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21 March –
3 April 2008
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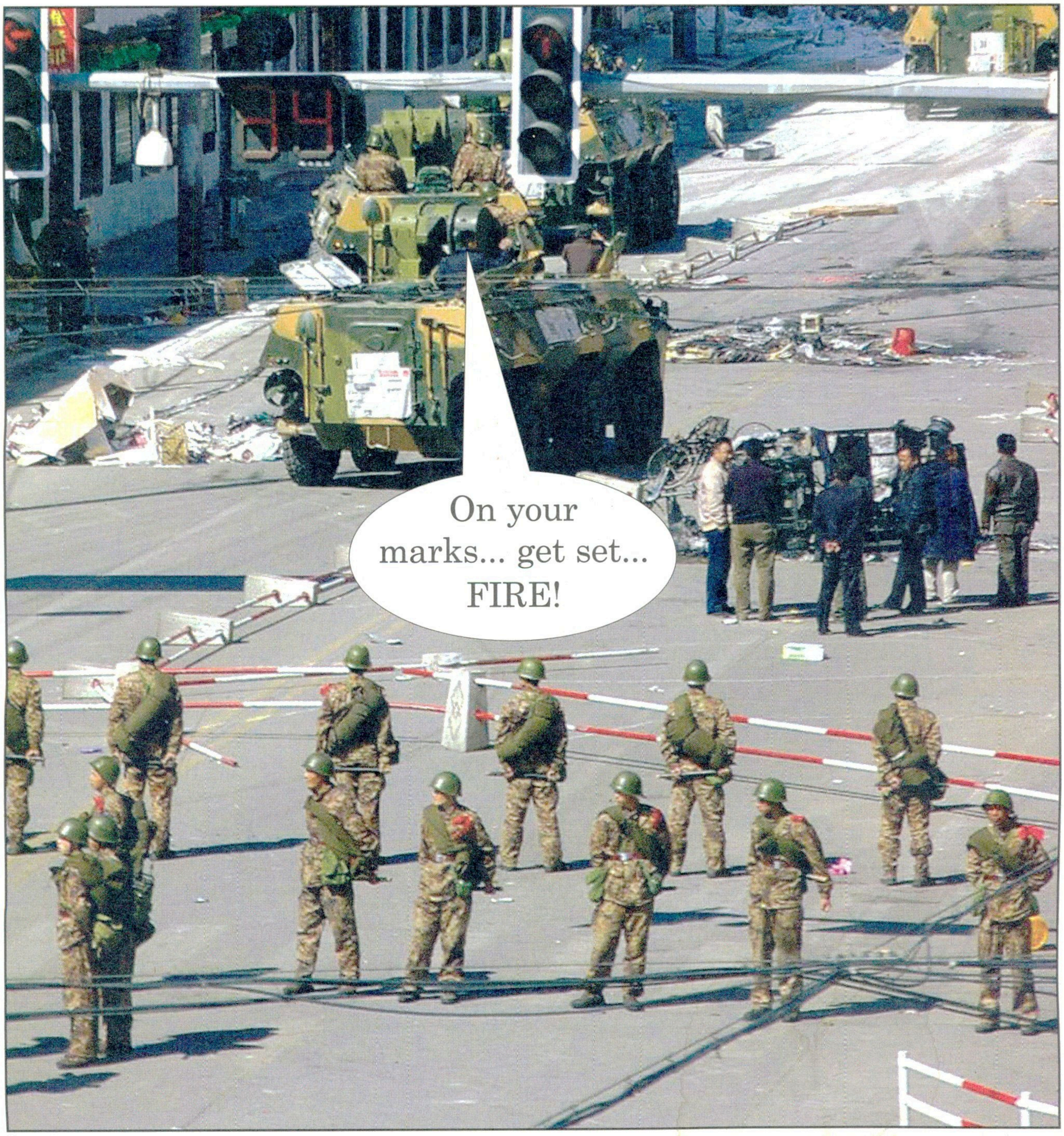

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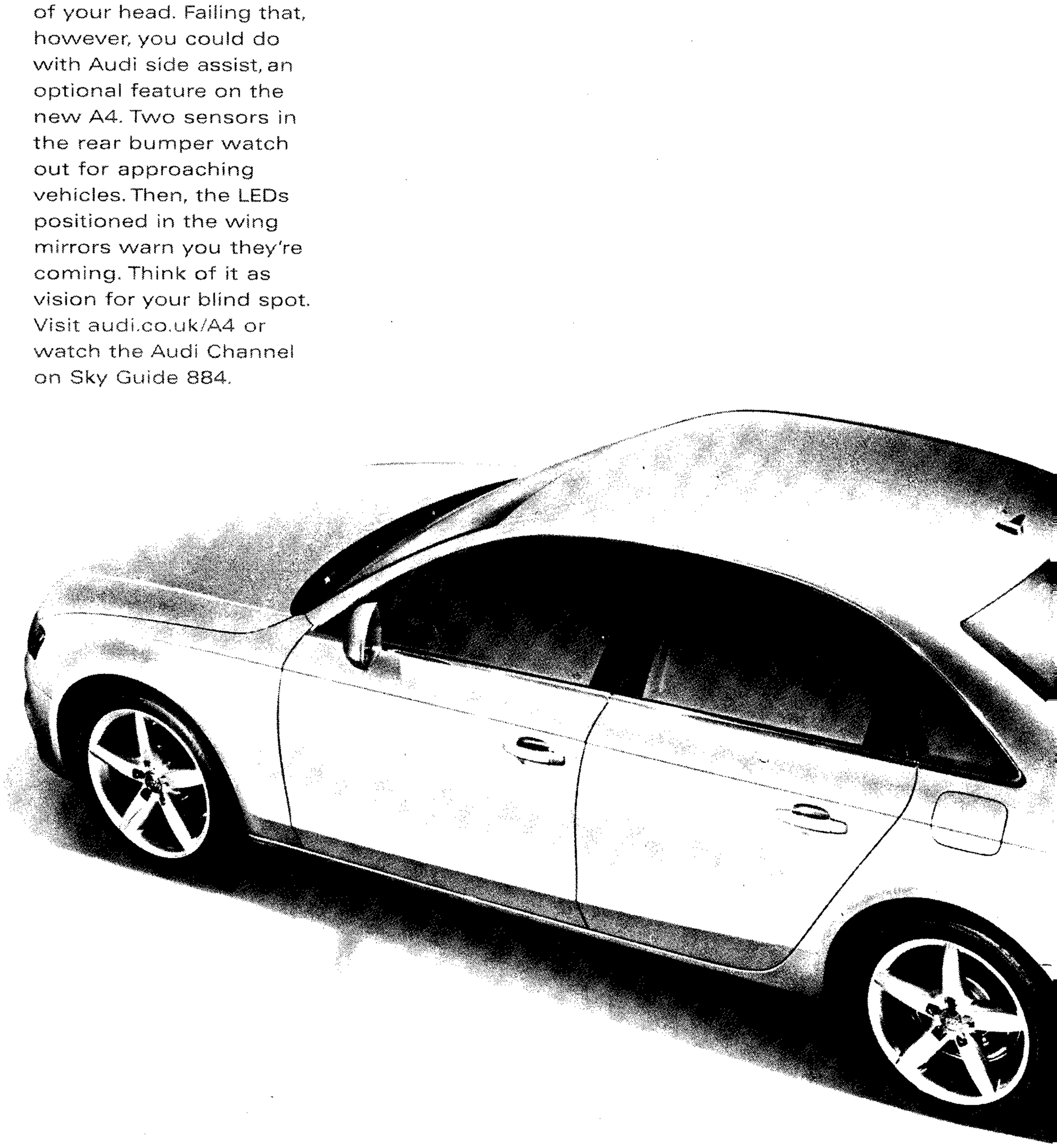

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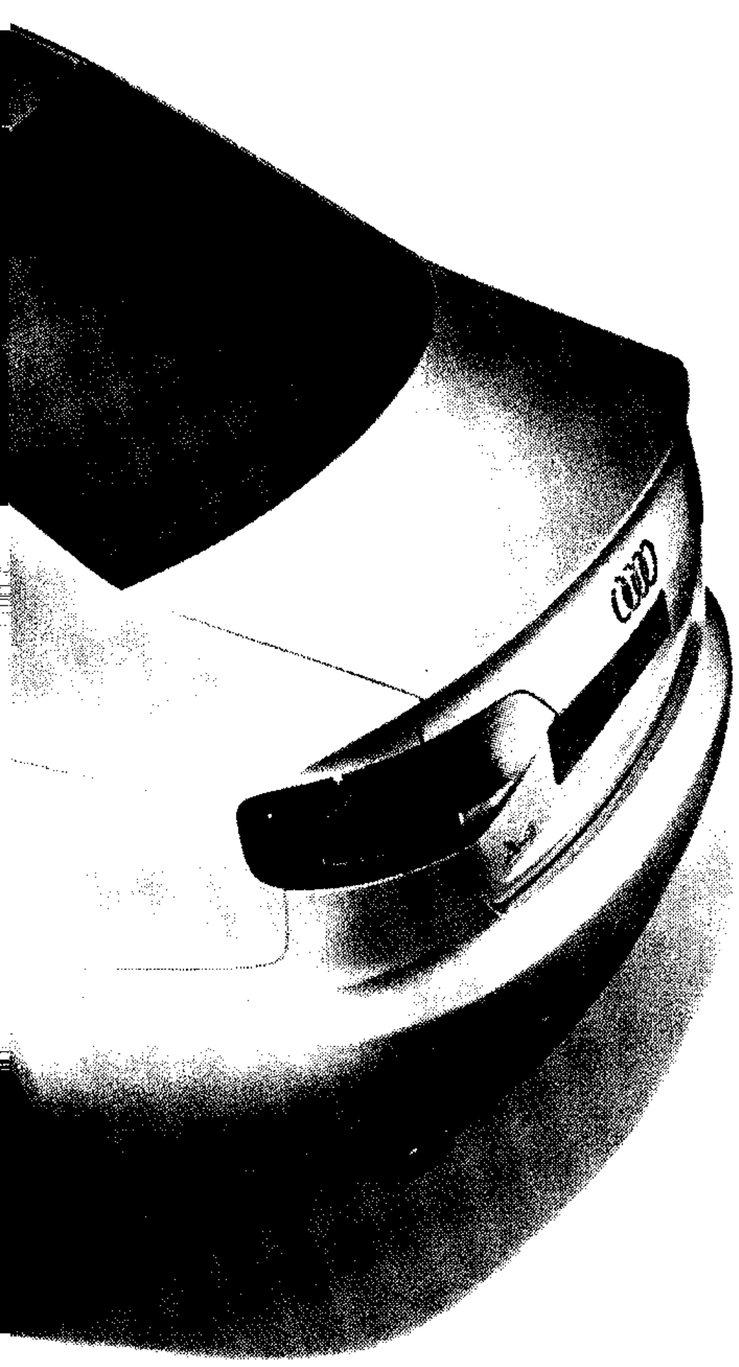

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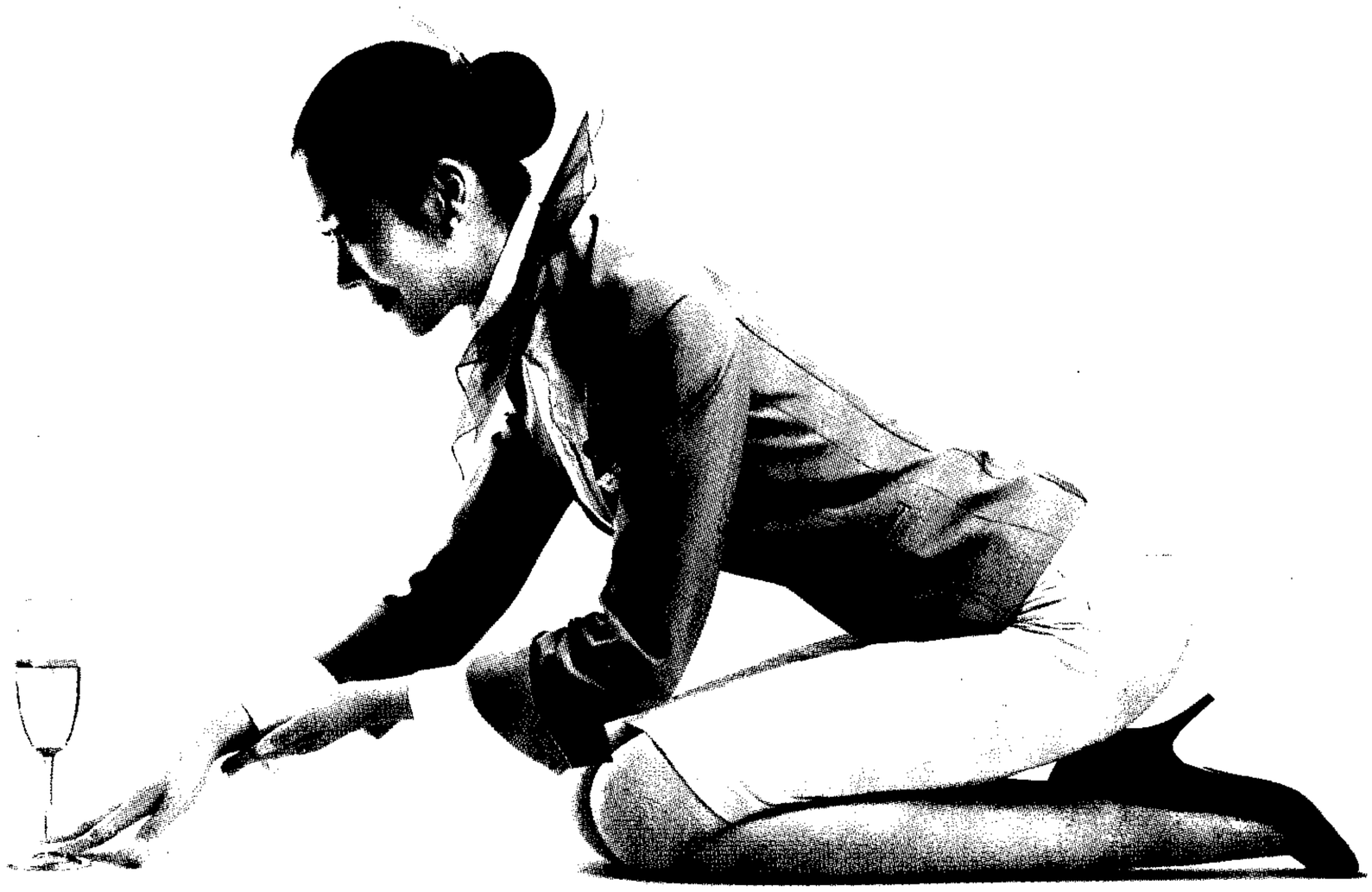

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Easter funnies

- **Capital offences: Newthound & Ratbiter** 6, 9
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NUMBER CRUNCHING

55% Percentage of Iraqis expressing optimism about future, according to opinion poll on anniversary of invasion

7% Percentage of Britons expressing optimism about future, according to opinion poll on Budget

NO SURPRISE that Alistair Darling fudged his way out of breaking his "sustainable investment" rule that debt mustn't exceed 40 percent of gross domestic product.

Even after dubiously leaving £100bn of Northern Rock debt out of the calculation, £30bn of PFI debt would have seen the limit broken had it been on the books. Which it would have been if the government had met its own commitments.

In response to demands from its advisory accountants last year that it should withdraw the rule that keeps PFI debts off balance sheet (brought in by Gordon Brown a decade ago), the Treasury claimed there was no need. In April this year it would adopt international accounting standards, and these would bring the debts on the books anyway. The beancounters were appeased.

But – lo and behold – a couple of weeks before budget day it emerged that the government won't be ready for the change for another year. The taxpayers' commitments to PFI will remain hidden in the same Enron-nether world that Darling and Brown recently blamed for the banking system's woes, while the fudge cooks for another year.

MONTHS of lobbying and schmoozing top Treasury officials by City bigwigs, not to mention the *FT*'s crusade, paid off with Alistair Darling's capitulation on offshore tax avoidance.

Far from closing loopholes, Darling went out of his way to approve them. Thus Brits claiming non-domiciled status, however long they have lived here, will be able to avoid tax on gains on British assets by simply placing them in an offshore trust. They can continue paying offshore mortgages on British houses, too, without being deemed to have brought the money into the UK. Small wonder the Society of Trust and Estate Practitioners could claim victory on "all the material points of our campaign" (a lot more than, say, environmentalists and poverty campaigners could boast).

Other deserving beneficiaries of Darling's largesse included the so-called "Monaco mob", who work in the UK but with the help of the odd private jet contrive tax residence on the Riviera, following an abject climbdown on changes to rules determining their tax status.

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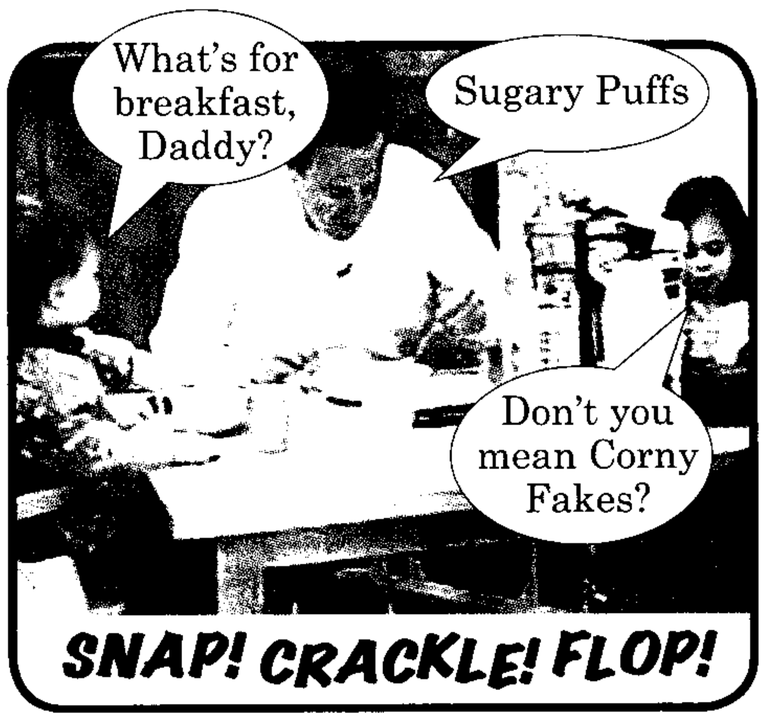
ABC

UNIVERSITY College London has come over all coy about the benefits of the private finance initiative recently. And no wonder.

"UCL has been researching and teaching on issues of PFI, PPP, and the management of major projects for many years now," boasted Andrew Edkins, director of the new courses. Indeed it has. As *Eye* readers well know, the author of the damning report *Pump-Priming the PFI*, which exposed the inflated costs of PFI projects back in 1999, was none other than Professor Allyson Pollock, until 2005 chair of public health policy at UCL.

Prof Pollock has devoted endless column inches and minutes of airtime demonstrating what poor value the privatisation schemes offer. Nevertheless the bigwigs at UCL have just signed a deal with 4ps, the Government's PFI advisory group for local authorities, to provide… training for PFI project directors!

LIGHTS! CAMERON! ACTION!



ED BALLS's friendship with Fleet Street bore fruit on budget day when the education secretary was accused of saying "so what?" to David Cameron's observation that Labour was the party of very high taxes.

Initially Balls seemed relaxed about the accusation – until political hacks started sniffing round and a frantic spin operation began. When word went out that "the *Express* is going to splash with the story", Balls got on the phone. Calls were made to the *Times*, *Sun*, *Daily Mail* and *Daily Telegraph*.

Mail editor Paul Dacre was tempted to run the story big but later lost interest after near-tearful pleas from Balls. The *Times*, *Sun* and *Hellograph* all squashed the story.

Surely this had nothing to do with Balls being holiday mates with the *Times*'s political editor Philip Webster and soccer mates with the *Sun*'s George Pascoe-Watson? Balls also likes to boast to intimates that he has "excellent lines into" the *Telegraph*'s little-experienced political editor Andrew Porter, who used to be Pascoe-Watson's deputy at Wapping and had many a beery night with Balls talking footie.

In the event only the *Express* went big on the story (Balls even got the Commons' official record, Hansard, to change its account of what was said). A rare triumph for Richard "Dirty" Desmond's journalists!

PATRICIA HEWITT Enterprises plc continues to out-perform most other Labour ex-ministers.

Hewitt's new £60,000-a-year post on the board of BT means she now has three corporate jobs to keep her busy when she is not representing Leicester West's voters in parliament.

BT has many reasons to want Hewitt on board: as trade secretary she was in charge of regulating BT; and when she was health secretary BT was awarded contracts on the troubled NHS National Programme for IT.

Hewitt's job recalls Norman Tebbit's 1987 appointment to the board of BT, which he helped privatise. His BT appointment became the emblem of Tory sleaze – as recently as 1995, Gordon Brown was still raising Tebbit's BT job as a sign of Conservative "jobs for the boys" sleaze, complaining: "The Cabinet room is becoming a recruiting ground for the boards of privatised companies."

Brown added: "It is wrong to be involved in the privatised industries one year and benefit from the privatisation the next." Whereas now, of course, er, it's perfectly all right apparently.

PETER TRUSCOTT was once a humble Labour Euro MP. Then he became Lord Truscott, Energy Minister. Now he has become a consultant to a financial PR firm called Gavin Anderson, whose "Public Affairs" unit specialises in what it calls "influencing legislation".

Gavin Anderson's most notable client? The controversial Russian energy giant, Gazprom.

WHEN Sir John Bourn resigned as boss of the National Audit Office after the *Eye's* revelations of his immense junketing, he pretended the reason was a conflict with his job as chairman of the Professional Oversight Board, an accountancy regulator.

Yet, as the *Eye* pointed out, he was hardly more suited to this job given his repeated failures to declare benefits including his wife's hotel costs and a chauffeured car. Now, soon after a review of the NAO found serial "governance" failings, Sir John has conceded the top beancounter-regulating job too. Perhaps fearing an embarrassing reverse, he has agreed not to stand for re-election this month. The 74-year old will remain on the partly taxpayer-funded payroll as a two-day-a-week adviser, though. Nobody has a vote on that.

"I'm off to marry Heather Mills"

Street Of Shame

"A BIOGRAPHY's claim that the *Telegraph*'s Bill Deedes had an affair with a younger colleague incenses Mary Ann Sieghart," the *Times* declared last Tuesday, above a full-page piece by Sieghart explaining why *Telegraph* hackette Victoria Combe couldn't possibly have been Deedes's girlfriend.

Her logic was persuasive. If Bill Deedes were the sort of chap who made passes at attractive young women, then he would surely have made a pass at Mary Ann Bighead. She listed some of the randy old goats who have tried their luck over the years and revealed that when they meet her, "most men are at least flirtatious, if not openly lecherous".

Not so Lord Deedes, who "never once said or did anything remotely improper". Therefore he didn't go to bed with Victoria Combe.

Shome mishtake! Stephen Robinson's biography of Deedes never says that he did. As the *Times* conceded in a correction last Thursday, hastily inserted in the hope of heading off a writ from Combe, the book "refers to their friendship, not to an affair".

Another thing it doesn't refer to is, er, Mary Ann Bighead, who isn't mentioned once despite her boast of being "great friends" with Deedes. Could this explain why she is so incensed?

GEOFFREY Robinson MP, the *New Statesman*'s paymaster, has at last found someone willing to take on the editorship – vacant for weeks since the "resignation" of John Kampfner. He is called Neal Lawson.

This is the same Neal Lawson who, after a stint as bag-carrier for Gordon Brown, set up the notorious political lobbying firm LLM in 1997. A year later he was approached by undercover *Observer* hack Greg Palast, who posed as businessman and asked what he could expect in return for a lavish monthly retainer. Trumping a rival outfit which offered Palast tea with, er, Geoffrey Robinson, Lawson boasted: "We can reach anyone. We can go to Gordon Brown if we have to."

Lawson isn't actually a journalist, of course, but to Robinson this is no hindrance to editing a weekly magazine: what matters is loyalty to the Supreme Leader. To this end he is having candidates for the editorship vetted by a three-man "board of advisers". It consists of Labour loyalist Ian Hargreaves, who was Robinson's first *NS* editor in 1996; Wilf Stevenson, who has been best friends with Gordon since they were at university; and Paul Myners, one of Gordon's favourite businessmen (and a donor to the Brown leadership campaign). If Robinson decides Lawson is the chap for the job, will these fellow-Brownites gainsay him?

Three years ago, Neal Lawson told the *Guardian* that if Tony Blair were truly listening "he would know that the electorate and the Labour Party want Gordon Brown to have his job. Gordon is a Labour giant". Last year, soon after Gordon's arrival at No 10, he declared that "Brown could be the first Labour leader since Clement Attlee to recast British society. A totally new and exciting narrative opens up..." Unless Geoffrey Robinson comes to his senses, *NS* readers can expect more of this *arslikhan* drivel every week. Lawson has been telling chums that he sees the *New Statesman* as "not so much a magazine, more a mechanism for repositioning the left". That should send circulation soaring!

REGIONAL newspaper group Archant told staff last week that it intends to sack more than 20 sub-editors, the staff responsible for checking, improving, legalling and presenting articles filed by reporters, and replace them with page designers, mostly recruited from advertising backgrounds.

"The use of non-journalists to lay out newspaper pages is a recipe for disaster," warned the company's union rep. "Without legal and journalistic training, they will have no idea of the potential pitfalls and the consequences could be catastrophic."

With brilliant timing, news of the redundancies broke days after one of Archant's papers, the *Eastern Daily Press,* apologised for illustrating a piece about the multiple-murderer of prostitutes Steve Wright with a photograph of... the Bishop of Norwich.

"NINE in 10 UK jobs go to foreigners," gasped the *Daily Telegraph* this month, pointing out that "the figures have been uncovered by a former Labour minister, Frank Field, who is urging the government to urgently restrict immigration from eastern Europe to help young Britons gain employment."

"This figure is devastating," Field informed readers of the paper's comment pages. "When the government opened up our labour market to eastern Europe in 2004 an avalanche of workers came to this country."

Well, get set for another flurry this week, as Polish newspaper *Gazeta Wyborcza* publishes a special "*Daily Telegraph* Jobs & Careers" supplement in association with the British paper's advertising department. "The editorial is written in Polish, focusing on: Why Move to England, How to Move to England, The Benefits of Working in England etc." an email from one of the *Telegraph*'s sales team breathlessly informed potential advertisers in a recent email.

DVDs are so over. CDs have had their day. When it comes to newspaper giveaways these days, the only game in town is Sweary Scrabble.

Eye reader Chris Lenartowicz uploaded the "Special Edition" Interactive Scrabble CD-Rom that fell out of his *Sunday Times* on 2 March into his PC and selected the option to play against a "virtual opponent". Within 17 moves, his computer managed to call him a cunt (nine points on a double letter square).

Slightly perturbed, Mr Lenartowicz (25 points) contacted the *Sunday Times* to complain – as, it would seem, did a number of others, judging by this apology in the following week's paper: "Unfortunately, in isolated instances, some of the words made by the computer player are inappropriate for a family game and offensive to many people. We apologise to readers. The computer player is drawing on the full, official Collins Scrabble dictionary of words. When a filter censoring out inappropriate words is in place, we will notify readers via the newspaper and the website."

The age group recommended on the cover of the CD-Rom? "3+".

THE ZZZ-LIST

"ANY fans of gentle countryside favourite *The Darling Buds Of May* awaiting one last gathering of the Larkin clan are in for a disappointment. Despite recently saying he would be delighted to pump up the wheels on the Reliant Robin and re-open Trotter's Independent Trading for another round of *Only Fools And Horses*, actor David Jason reveals he's not interested in reprising his role as Pa Larkin in the ITV programme.

'One series I would never resurrect is The Darling Buds Of May,' confirms the 68-year-old."

– Day and Night column,
Daily Express, *14 March*

HERE's a bit of top celebrity gossip: heiress Paris Hilton was seen out in LA with a bearded holy man dressed in saffron robes, handing out specially-blessed jewellery to passers by.

This important story was keenly covered in Britain by the *Sun* ("Paris Gets a New Buddhy"), *Mirror* ("she bizarrely hit the town with a bearded mystic"), *Daily Mail* ("the latest must-have accessory, a personal shaman" and *Daily Star* ("Paris' Night of Shaman!").

But here's an even better bit of top celebrity gossip: it was announced days later that the entire thing had been set up by actor Ashton Kutcher for his new series *Pop Fiction* for the US network *E!,* in which famous faces stage fake stories in an attempt to trick the paparazzi and media into reporting them.

Oddly, this last snippet was entirely ignored by the *Sun, Mirror, Daily Mail* and *Daily Star.*

"She was carrying a pair of scissors"

NEWS

KEN LIVINGSTONE's chief-of-staff Simon Fletcher had a lame excuse for why no one at City Hall had bothered to check whether the London mayor's former race adviser Lee Jasper had any conflicts of interest before he was exposed in the press.

"There is no point having someone with a great deal of authority if they don't take responsibility for this aspect of their own work," said Fletcher.

Jasper resigned earlier this month after his cringe-making emails to Karen Chouhan, company secretary of race group the 1990 Trust, which Jasper funded through City Hall, were revealed. Inquiries are continuing into what happened to millions of pounds arranged by Jasper for a number of London Development Agency-supported projects – funds which remain unaccounted for.

Fletcher's statement to the press was disingenuous in the extreme. Emails seen by the *Eye* show that as long ago as 2003 at least one senior figure at City Hall *did* have serious concerns about Jasper's behaviour.

In that year Jasper and Kumar Murshid, another Ken adviser, contrived to sponsor a London Muslim Coalition meeting which was paid for out of the mayor's hospitality budget. Alas, neither Jasper nor Murshid told anyone about it.

When the senior official discovered what had happened, he wrote, in April 2003: "Lee, this situation is too lax, too vague and too confused, with inadequate and unclear reporting lines flowing from staff actually responsible for this area of work. It is not reasonable for you to give in-principle support to fund an outside body without discussion with Atma [*Singh, the mayor's Asian affairs adviser*], Redmond [*O'Neill, the deputy chief of staff*] or me [*Simon Fletcher – for it was he!*].

"It is precisely this sort of activity," Fletcher continued, "that can piss-off outside bodies and throw our procedures into chaos." How very prescient.

'Newthound'

● *Mayor Culpa: See Ratbiter 9.*

"TRIPS to war-torn countries are smug, not ethical," declared the headline over a piece by *Observer* columnist Barbara Ellen attacking the hypocrisy of western tourists tempted by travel operators to holiday in Sierra Leone – officially the world's poorest country, according to the UN – and other war-torn destinations.

Ellen was scathing about travellers "whose reports from ill-starred, faraway places invariably stress the tremendous good cheer of people who have, on the face of it, little to look forward to beyond privation, illness and death".

Two weeks later the main story in the *Observer*'s travel section was about a holiday taken in Sierra Leone by Clemency Burton-Hill. Sure enough, the natives were in tremendous good cheer. "Where else," Burton-Hill chirruped, "can you sit around of an evening and talk to people in the world's poorest country who, beaming at you, will shake their heads and insist: 'Sierra Leone isn't poor'?"

SHINE, the production company which makes *Masterchef*, had an alarming call from the *News of the Screws* a few weeks ago. The *Screws* intended to run a story exposing the programme's co-host, shouty greengrocer Gregg Wallace, as a thoroughly unpleasant womanising football hooligan with convictions for theft and threatening behaviour.

Shine executives were horrified. Gregg is an important asset, to be protected at all costs. They offered the *Screws* a deal: spike the hatchet-job, do a story saying he's a reformed character and you can come along and talk to him. Full access, exclusive.

The paper duly ran a spread with cheeky chappy Gregg ("the genial food expert") confessing to his bad-boy past but insisting that it's all behind him now.

Meanwhile, hacks at the *Sun* were preparing a hatchet-job as well. Having already committed Wallace exclusively to the *Screws*, Shine could hardly offer a similar arrangement to its daily stablemate. Help was at hand. The chairman and CEO of Shine, one Elisabeth Murdoch, rang her daddy. Lo and behold, the *Sun* suddenly lost all interest in the story!

THE BUSKER, THE BLOGGERS AND THE BORIS BULLSHIT

IT WAS the story that was too good to be true – and, er, it was.

The tale of Conservative mayoral candidate Boris Johnson staging a photo-opportunity in which he pretended to give a £20 note to a busker in Croydon, only to pocket it when the cameras had departed, did the rounds of blogs with names like "Labourhome", "Bloggers4Labour" and "John's Labour Blog" recently, although the only national paper credulous enough to run it was the *Daily Express*.

The initial crop of blog postings was, equally predictably, followed by rants from Boris supporters claiming that "This is an abomidable [*sic*] attempt by the Ken for Mayor machine to spray mud on Boris."

None of those who picked up on the story appeared bothered by the fact that no pictorial evidence of the supposed photo-op existed, or that it originated in an email from Quite Great PR, a company specialising in "a discrete [*sic*] campaign of online postings, creative ideas etc. to raise awareness of the availability of our clients' ranges and products".

As well as representing the recently released album by the "busker" in question – whom the *Eye* has no intention of naming – Quite Great are best known for representing Sandi Thom, the pisspoor singer-songwriter who rose to fame two years ago amid widely reported claims that she had "webcast" gigs from her Tooting flat to an audience of 70,000 because she was too poor to tour. That story, too, was exposed as nonsense.

WITH Roger Alton gone, new *Observer* editor John Mulholland is bringing the paper into line with its more powerful daily stablemate, the *Guardian*.

The fifth anniversary of the Iraq invasion was the occasion for Mulholland to run a full-page leader last Sunday that amounted to a *mea culpa* on behalf of his predecessor. "Too much credence was given generally to the government's account of the need for war," it admitted, which is about as close as it gets to disowning Alton's pro-Blair line. As a further gesture of surrender there was a 12-page pullout with more hand-wringing about the war.

So, after years of sniping and hand-to-hand combat, has the *Guardian* won the war of Farringdon Road? Not quite. Despite Mulholland's retreat there are still Altonists at the *Obs* who will never surrender to the Rusbridgerite conquerors. *Lutta continua!*

"OUR language needs some new blooms," announced *Times* columnist and MP Michael Gove on 4 March, "to describe the new dilemmas and pressures of modern life."

He went on to offer a number of "suggestions for new words" based on popular place names, such as "Chipping Norton (n) the fear that hits you, as you're heading off to the airport for a relaxing fortnight in Acapulco, that you might have left the cooker on."

If Gove is hoping there might be a book in this, he's right – *The Meaning of Liff*, by John Lloyd and Douglas Adams, attributing place names to the "hundreds of common experiences, feelings, situations and even objects which we all know and recognize, but for which no words exist", came out in 1983.

If Gove is unaware of their superior efforts, he should check out the *Daily Telegraph* each Saturday, where Lloyd recently revived the idea in a regular column.

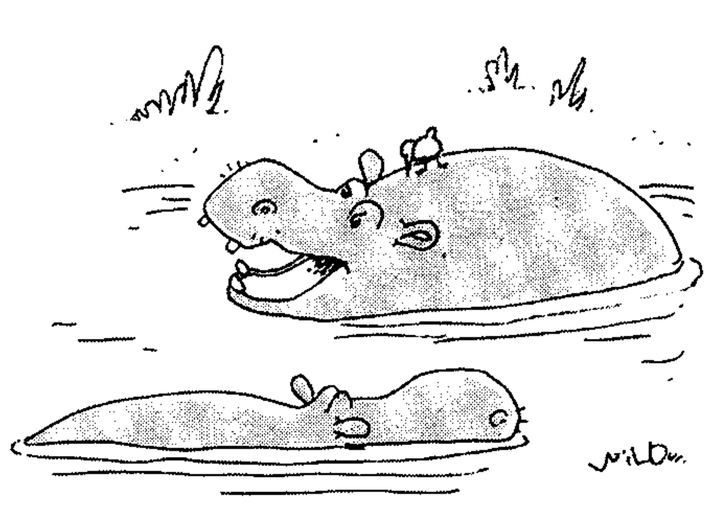
WORLD OF HYPE

SALLY COSTERTON, UK chief executive of multinational PR firm Hill & Knowlton, is shocked and appalled at any suggestion that PR firms have a malign influence on the media.

So she joined a panel of hacks, including the *Standard*'s Andrew Gilligan, former *Grauniad* editor Peter Preston and *Flat Earth News* author Nick Davies, to discuss issues raised by Davies's book at the London College of Communications on 5 March.

"I don't believe there is a problem of transparency. We don't make up stories; it's not in our interest," she told the audience. This will have reassured any listeners who recalled Hill & Knowlton's historic triumphs, including lobbying for the US to grant China "most favoured nation status" despite the Tiananmen Square massacre and that story about Saddam's soldiers removing babies from hospital incubators and leaving them to die after the 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. Totally false, but very influential in getting US public opinion behind the 1991 attack on Iraq.

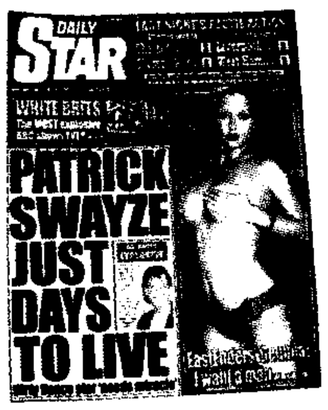
Whereas Gilligan, Davies, Preston and the rest were invited by the hosts, *Press Gazette*, Costerton was only present because Hill & Knowlton had offered to sponsor the event and provide drinks on condition H&K had a presence on the platform. *Press Gazette* agreed but somehow neglected to mention it to the audience.



"Oi! Are you looking at my bird?"

STARS IN THE EYE

DESPITE having to lead on complete rubbish most days, *Daily Star* hacks still know a front-page story when it jumps up and bites them on the arse.



Genuine splash

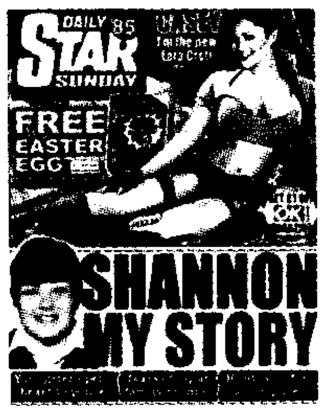
"Praise the Lord, a genuine splash!" cried the newsdesk on learning that *Dirty Dancing* star Patrick Swayze had just weeks to live. But enter chairman Richard "Dirty" Desmond and his editorial director/minder, Paul Ashford, and with editrix Dawn Neesom away, Desmond seized his chance to take over her chair for the evening.

Desmond trash

Unimpressed with the weight of the Swayze story, he commanded that the splash should be, er, a completely made-up story from page 3 about Jennifer Ellison's amazing 32DD bosoms distracting her randy co-star Reece Shearsmith in the low-budget horror-comedy *The Cottage*: "JEN'S £5m BOOB. Cleavage busts film budget!" After all, no one knows better than Dirty Des that sex sells.

The protests of deputy editor Ben Knowles and his execs were brushed aside with a booming: "Just fucking change it." Frantic telephone calls to footie-mad Neesom – who was watching her beloved West Ham get soundly hammered 4-0 up in Liverpool – were similarly dismissed. "Fack off – I'm watching the fackin' match," she explained daintily.

FOLLOWING its other misleading front-page splashes (on a wife-beating footballer who wasn't Ashley Cole; and the death of a "Del Boy" who wasn't actor David Jason – see *Eye* 1205), the *Daily Star Sunday* really excelled itself with its 16 March front-page teaser: "SHANNON: MY STORY".



...er, or not

Naturally this referred not to an exclusive interview with the recently retrieved nine-year-old Shannon Matthews, nor even any indication of what might have happened to her during the time she was missing: it was merely the "revelation" that she had "started telling police the story of her 24 days in captivity".

Never mind the Press Complaints Commission: surely it's time for trading standards to intervene on behalf of cheated *Star* readers.

SO. WELCOME back Clive Goodman, former royal editor of the *News of the World*, jailed for four months in 2007 for illegally bugging the phones at Clarence House.

He re-emerged this month on the *Daily Star Sunday*, sticking to what he knows best with the inside scoop on Prince Harry's movements after arriving back from Afghanistan and the revelation that the second in line to the throne's "sprouting ginger eyebrows are kept in check with regular grooming sessions".

He also seems to be keeping in touch with old friends, judging by last Sunday's story of how "grubby John Prescott is to be clobbered with the £3,320 bill for cleaning up his former official London residence... so filthy it required a deep-clean by an army of Mrs Mops."

That tale originated in a press release from the Conservatives – "Prescott must pay back cost of 'army of Whitehall cleaners'" – prepared by the party's head of communications, Andy Coulson – Goodman's former editor, who was forced to fall on his sword after his protégé was jailed.

WHO IS Philip Remnant, one of the lesser names picked by Gordon Brown to serve on the Northern Rock board?

The Eton-educated son and heir to the third Lord Remnant was brought into Northern Rock from the Shareholder Executive: a board of bankers founded by Brown in 2003 to look after the government's share of nationalised and part nationalised companies like the Post Office or BNFL.

Remnant has spent the last few years in public service, serving on the Takeover Panel before the Shareholder Executive. However, one of Remnant's most notable jobs in investment banking was helping Enron expand in 2000. As a director of Credit Suisse First Boston, Remnant helped arrange Enron's purchase of London-based metals trader MG, with a Credit Suisse loan.

The purchase led to the formation of Enron Metals, which within a year was fined £190,000 for "inadequate" compliance with trading regulations: CSFB helped Enron purchase the unit for £300m. Within a year Enron collapsed and the unit was sold off for £99m. Given that Northern Rock headed towards disaster because this firm had also moved away from the simple business of deposits and home loans into more complex financial trades, one can only hope Remnant learned from the Enron collapse.

WORRYING signs that the Treasury hasn't grasped this Northern Rock nationalisation business.

Asked by Lib Dem MP Vincent Cable how much Virgin was being paid for its abortive bid work, exchequer secretary Angela Eagle claimed: "As a commercial bank, Northern Rock will pay these expenses out of its own income, not from the taxpayer," completely missing the point that the bank's income and expenses *are* the taxpayer's.

Nor is it any good turning to freedom of information laws to get the figures since the bank has been deemed for this purpose not to be publicly owned (see last *Eye*). Maybe loyal Brownite Eagle has taken the reinvention of history a little too much to heart.

FROM THE SANDPIT

ON 15 February, two separate inquests into the deaths of soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan concluded that both were due in part to the lack of suitable equipment they had requested from the Ministry of Defence.

"To send soldiers into a combat zone without basic equipment is unforgivable, inexcusable and a breach of trust between the soldiers and those who govern them," ruled Oxford coroner Andrew Walker; while his Wiltshire colleague David Masters said he would meet with the armed forces minister to point out that it was "imperative that our forces, whether they be in Iraq or Afghanistan, are given the best available equipment".

A mere seven days later, the MoD swung into action, with a contract put out to tender by the Defence Clothing Integrated Project Team. The task? To "manufacture, supply & refurbish up to approx 2,200 swords, scabbards, dirks, sgian dubhs and lances over a four-year period", along with the "possibility of development work". And the cost for these ceremonial objects? The MoD is prepared to pay up to £5m.

Meanwhile back in the present day, the news that British forces returning from tours of duty only to be banned from wearing their uniforms in public for fear of upsetting civilians was hardly new. Soldiers have had to change into civvies before leaving Brize Norton for several years now; and following ops in Boznatraz (aka Bosnia), troops were always brought home at night to avoid upsetting the locals.

Brize Norton has in fact operated a "no uniform policy" since 2005, with lads stripping off their "dessies" and popping on their shell suits on the tarmac. The policy was dreamed up by an MoD concerned that masses of uniformed squaddies would get drunk and beast our towns – like so many non-service personnel under 35 do every Saturday night.

'Square Basher'

BRUSSELS SPROUTS

WHEN not presiding over bank collapses or churning out boring budgets, Alistair Darling still finds time to be a governor of the European Investment Bank (EIB), a kind of European Union version of the World Bank.

Darling replaced Gordon Brown on the EIB board when he became chancellor and is assisted by British KPMG man Timothy Stone, an "expert director" of the EIB. Like Brown, Darling is very keen on the PFI, and with Stone's help they seem to have persuaded the EIB to lend massive amounts to British PFI schemes. Since the 2005 election alone, the EIB has loaned at least €2.5bn (nearly £2bn) to UK PFIs. EIB loans are at very good rates, so this represents a massive public subsidy to UK PFI schemes.

EIB loans have helped float some of the larger and more contentious PFIs: schemes backed since the last election include the Barts Hospital and Birmingham Hospital PFIs. Before then, £600m of EIB loans went to the now-failed Metronet London Underground privatisation.

Stone is a frequent adviser to the government on PFI, and his company also has a particular interest as it frequently earns fees advising on schemes. Indeed, KPMG was paid to advise on four of the 15 PFI schemes backed by the EIB – the North Staffs Hospital, Cornwall Waste Management, Lanarkshire Schools and Northern Ireland M1/Westlink roads schemes – while these PFIs also received generous EIB loans.

CALLED TO ORDURE

SOME might call it candour; others would consider it arrogance. A Labour MP brought a bill to the Commons the other day admitting that he barely knew what he was talking about.

John Heppell (Nottingham East), who astonishingly was a minister in the Blair government, came fifth in the recent lucky draw for private members' bills. These give MPs a stab at getting a law on to the statute books; and Heppell decided he would try to make life difficult for venture capitalists by drafting the Private Equity (Transfer of Undertakings and Protection of Employment) Bill. Heppell wanted to place greater legal requirements on investors to consult employees at the companies whose shares they buy.

"When I first embarked on this process I was fairly clear that I knew very little about private equity takeovers," he told the Commons. He had "approached it not as any kind of expert" and had remained in that balmy condition. "I found most of the language and most of the drafting of the bill very confusing."

It is rare for an MP to admit to such dimness, not least because many of them take the view that you should not tell your fellow citizens what to do from a position of ignorance. Maybe Heppell, a sometime diesel fitter who once had "Love" and "Hate" tattoos removed from his knuckles, can be admired for being honest. But if he knew so little, who encouraged him to propose the law? Who put him up to it? Heppell announced that he had been "helped" by Jack Dromey, prominent member of the TGWU and husband of Labour's deputy leader Harriet Harman.

A Tory, James Duddridge (Rochford), asked a basic question: what was Heppell's definition of "private equity".

Heppell: "I do not want to get bogged down in the legal niceties of these things. Let me freely admit that I have made mistakes."

Christopher Chope (Con, Christchurch) said that if the House didn't even know what his definition of a prime part of the bill was, "we have not even passed the first hurdle". Heppell lamely said he rather agreed with Chope. He was thinking of changing the title of his bill when it reached its next stage of parliamentary scrutiny.

Labour MPs started to jump into the debate to try to protect the increasingly hapless Heppell. Tony Lloyd (Manchester C), David Kidney (Stafford) and Tom Clarke (Coatbridge) all made interventions when Heppell looked as though he was about to sink under the weight of the debate.

Heppell by now was saying that his definition of "private equity" was contained in the explanatory notes to the bill. Stalling, he then said: "I have lost my train of thought again." Further debate showed that Heppell's bill mentioned "substantial" shareholders, whereas he in fact meant "controlling" shareholders. Bit of a difference between those two. "It is in lawyers' words," he complained. "I cannot pretend that I even understand it. It is the old thing – I am talking about things that I know, but which I do not have the legalistic jargon to go through."

This may sound a reasonable line of argument – which of us has not, at some stage, been enraged by legalese? – but the remarkably thick Heppell, a one-time aide to John Prescott, was not the best man to make it. Even a school debating contestant would have been more on top of the detail.

Jonathan Djanogly (Con, Huntingdon) was next to ask about his bill's statutory provisions. Heppell: "I have lost the point on that." Mr Chope bounced back to ask him if the Northern Rock sale would have been affected by his bill (ie would Rock employees have had to be consulted by the government before nationalisation?)

Heppell: "To be honest, I am not great expert on Northern Rock." Nor on much else it seems! By now his bill was plummeting earthwards.

Was his bill possibly going to inconvenience New Labour which always wants to seem pro-business? "Let us be clear," said Heppell. "I am a serial loyalist. I would not want to put the government in a position in which there would be drastic consequences."

Sure enough, the bill was later withdrawn, but not because it could have had "drastic consequences". There was the more basic reason that its proposer was completely out of his depth and should never have tried to introduce it in the first place.

'Gavel Basher'

EU-phemisms

We've decided to do nothing and leave it to someone else to sort out in 12 years

NUMBER CRUNCHING

£5,616 Annual income beneath which someone is living in poverty, according to government rules

£6,335 Public money MPs can spend on installing a new bathroom, according to parliamentary rules

HUTTON STEW

SO PEOPLE should be encouraged to get rich because "aspiration and ambition are natural human emotions", according to business secretary John Hutton. Unless, it seems, the aspiration and ambition are limited to avoiding destitution in old age.

As pensions secretary until Gordon Brown shifted him to business last year, Hutton consistently opposed any compensation for 85,000 people who had lost their pensions in large part because of misleading government assurances. In the process Hutton wilfully exaggerated the cost to the government of paying up and ignored the courts and the parliamentary ombudsman. After repeated protests and a change of pensions secretary, the government is now finally doing something like the decent thing. No thanks to John "aspiration" Hutton.

PS: The big earners wasted no time getting to work on Hutton when he took the business brief last year. Within a week he was enjoying men's semi-final day at Wimbledon as guest of mega-bonus paying investment bank, UBS.

HUTTON'S favoured way of making businessmen extremely wealthy is "outsourcing" as many public services to them as possible. Hence his ongoing review to "identify the facts and factors that could support its growth". The outsourcing business, he claimed, "has made a tremendous contribution to UK plc".

Back in the real world everyone else is going off it. Private sector surveys conclude that outsourcing any but the most ancillary tasks like cleaning generally doesn't work.

In the public sector, however, the fiasco remains officially covered up. Against a background of countless local government outsourcing disasters courtesy of companies like Capita (see *Rotten Boroughs passim ad nauseam*), a recent Audit Commission investigation of "service delivery partnerships" somehow concluded that "if managed robustly, these agreements become true partnerships that deliver benefits for users and council taxpayers alike".

The whitewash is great news for Hutton's bid to privatise public services and the beneficiaries of £40bn of public cash. Among those will be PA Consulting – where Audit Commission chairman Michael O'Higgins just happened until recently to have been head of "government services", aka... outsourcing.

"There must be an easier way to get our son into this school"

Down on the Farm

A RARE bright spot in the farming world in recent years has been the rise of farmers' markets. Everyone benefits. Farmers can sell directly to those who buy their produce without having to lose a hefty chunk of the proceeds to the retail trade. Their customers can often buy higher quality food than they would find on the shelves of Tesco. Selling direct to the local community cuts down dramatically on those notorious "food miles". But, since much of the produce sold in these markets is meat, crucial to their success has been the availability of small local slaughterhouses – and here, yet again, a nasty shadow looms.

Back in the 1990s, no story preoccupied this column more than the Maffia's bizarre assault, egged on by Tory ministers such as John Gummer and Nicholas Soames, on the nation's smaller abattoirs. Supposedly to implement EU legislation, Britain's meat industry was served with a massive double whammy of new regulations.

First, the smaller slaughterhouses were told they must spend millions of pounds on structural changes, to bring them into line with the 80 or so large industrial abattoirs, mainly serving supermarkets, which had already been through these hoops in the 1980s to comply with "EC export rules". The difference was that the big operators had been given lavish subsidies to meet the new requirements, whereas their smaller competitors would have to pay for the changes themselves.

Then in 1993 they had to pay further huge sums for animals to be inspected by a new army of veterinary officials, because this is the way meat inspection has been traditionally carried out on the continent. Abattoir owners had to shell out up to £65 an hour to watch the new officials, often recruited from Spain and speaking little English, standing round not doing much, on top of having to pay their normal British meat inspectors to do the real work.

From 1995 these veterinary officials were employed by the Meat Hygiene Service, a new "self-financing regulatory agency" set up by Tory ministers over opposition from, among others, Tony Blair.

Within a few years, the number of abattoirs still in business collapsed from 1,200 to less than 400, leaving much of the countryside without a slaughterhouse to serve the needs of local farmers. But in 2000 the MHS, now part of the new Food Standards Agency, announced that, to comply with EU requirements, it was going to have to impose yet more increases in its charges, to make its "inspection service" self-financing.

In face of nationwide protest, supported by organisations such as the National Trust, ministers allowed the FSA to back off, agreeing that inspection charges could be kept down by government subsidy. But now, as the nation's finances are squeezed to crisis point by Gordon Brown's overspending, the FSA has announced that it can no longer pay a subsidy only made necessary in the first place by the fact that the government had imposed by far the highest meat inspection charges in Europe. Smaller abattoirs now face increases in their inspection costs of up to 800 percent (one small Welsh slaughterhouse, for instance, has been told that, its charges will rise from £10,000 to £77,000 a year).

As usual, the big factory abattoirs, not interested in killing small numbers of animals for local farmers and butchers, will be unaffected. But scores more of their smaller competitors will have to close. The brief heyday of farmers' markets could soon be over.

'Muckspreader'

MAYOR CULPA

AT CHRISTMAS, political commentators assumed Ken Livingstone was a shoo-in for mayor of London. As Easter comes, he is fighting to save his career. To understand why, you have to grasp the outrage on the left at his decision to turn his back on liberal British Muslims and ally himself with ultra-reactionary Islamists.

Livingstone and his coterie bullied insiders who protested – but not into silence. Revulsion at his strange alliances lies behind the devastating leaks about public money going astray and six-figure salaries going to members of Socialist Action, the tiny Trotskyist sect Livingstone employs at public expense.

The most senior whistleblower is Atma Singh, a member of Socialist Action and Livingstone's adviser on Asian affairs. In 2003, his comrades urged Livingstone to ally with the Arab Muslim Brotherhood and Jamaat-i-Islami (feminists, gays, Jews and apostates need not apply).

Singh was stunned. He tried to stop Livingstone embracing Yusuf al-Qaradawi, the Muslim Brotherhood's chief theologian, who along with the usual attacks on women, apostates and the rest had said of the civilian victims of suicide bombings in Israel: "We cannot say that the casualties are innocent civilians. They are not civilians or innocent." Livingstone's staff arranged for the sheikh to visit London with the help of the Muslim Association of Britain, a small group whose leader declared: "As a Muslim, martyrdom is an integral part of Islamic theology." Singh confronted Redmond O'Neill, Livingstone's chief of staff.

"I objected to Livingstone saying we must work with al-Qaradawi and others who were soft on suicide attacks on Israelis," Singh told the *Eye*. "I said that we had a good relationship with London's Jews and the Board of Deputies of British Jews worked with us in the National Assembly Against Racism. But O'Neill went on and on about the Board of Deputies of British Jews. He said they represented the 'Zionist lobby' and 'we must smash the Zionists'.

"Livingstone was more interested in the Muslim vote and thought that by pandering to al-Qaradawi he could get it. He began to say things he would never have said before, calling a Jewish reporter a concentration camp guard and telling Jewish businessmen to leave the country."

As soon as Singh spoke out, Livingstone and his aides blackballed him. "They took control of faith matters away from me. I was completely isolated."

In the end, Singh had a nervous breakdown and resigned. But his departure did Livingstone no good. For the past two months, Singh has been, er, singing like a canary and telling the papers how Socialist Action appointees fundraised and campaigned for Livingstone when they were meant to be neutral civil servants.

'Ratbiter'

ETVE

The Passion (BBC1)
10 Days to War (BBC2)

ONE of Thommo's mottos for his BBC is "fewer and bigger", suggesting that departments should concentrate their falling budgets on projects that fill newspaper columns rather than merely fill space. Two examples of this concentration of energy have just reached the screens: epic dramatisations of well-known stories.

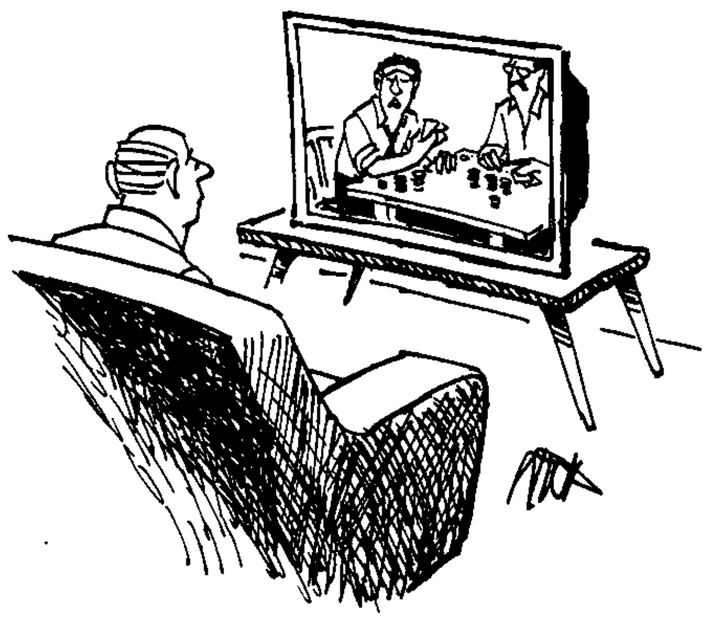
The Passion is a post-scandal sop to those who argue that the corporation has lost sight of its traditional values. *Telegraph*-reading cynics would assume that the BBC's natural choice for the biography of a major religious leader would be *The Life of Mohammed*, although, in truth, this project has probably only failed to reach the screens because of Islam's interdiction on visual representations of the prophet.

But, anyway, the Beeb has decided to retell the story of Jesus, although rapidly hitting trouble with the constituency it was seeking to appease: there were complaints in the churchier newspapers that the department making the drama is now called BBC Fiction.

In fact, as it turns out, sceptics didn't need to be concerned. *The Passion* tries to tell it as straight as possible. Christ (Joseph Mawle) seems to have no interest in entering a civil partnership with Simon Peter, but he does not obviously have the hots for Mary Magdalene either. And, while he wears a head-wrap that looks from certain angles like a Che-beret, Frank Deasy's script attempts no simplistic political parallel: Jesus is not Nelson Mandela or Gerry Adams or Yasser Arafat. Indeed, refreshingly, an Irish actor, James Nesbitt, is cast as the colonial oppressor, Pontius Pilate.

The problem is that some liberal idea of "BBC balance" seems to have been imposed on the baddies in the narrative. The humanisation of Pontius Pilate has been a standard part of modern crucifixion narratives: Tony Blair once wrote an article about how the Roman leader was cruelly caught between his "advisers" and the "public". But this version goes much further.

Presumably mindful of the flak Mel Gibson took for his



"Don't try this at home. Remember, I'm a trained professional"

characterisation of the Jewish characters, the series is careful to make Caiaphas (Ben Daniels) a loving husband and father who is faced with a tricky public-order situation. Even Judas (Paul Nicholls) is essentially a good bloke who gets used as a patsy by the conspirators.

Indeed, there's something very BBC about the whole approach to the story, rather as if a retired executive – a Will Wyatt or Ron Neil – had carried out an investigation into the Corporation's handling of the Jesus Project. The report concludes that there was a "systemic failure of communication" between the Temple authorities and the Roman residents. Perhaps High Priest Caiaphas should have "referred upwards" his concerns about the bearded preacher. And, if Judas had received firmer "line management" or "mentoring", is it possible he would not have subverted the project?

Also, as in all modern takes on the Bible, there's the problem of how the people speak. Clearly frightened that the gospel dialogue might make the 8pm audience switch off, the production opts for anachronistic modern speech.

When Caiaphas tells the missus that "Pilate comes from Caesarea today", she rolls her eyes and moans: "Don't!" When Pilate tells a lady friend of the problems he has with the temple authorities, she commiserates: "I don't know how you deal with them. I really don't!" At times, the conversations so closely resemble those in Albert Square that you half-expect Joseph of Arimathea to announce he's got things "sorted".

When *Newsnight* revealed that it was turning to drama for the first time, you rather hoped it would be like those end-of-year pantos staged by *Nationwide* with the presenters in costumes: perhaps Paxo and Emily Maitlis would act out *Gone with the Wind*. In fact, **10 Days to War** employs professional luvvies to play out background scenes from the period leading up to the invasion of Iraq.

There's ten minutes a night, rather unwisely followed by the originals of the characters discussing their portrayal in the *Newsnight* studio. If they'd done more drama, they'd know that real-life models always attack "faction" and you end up with a furious Clare Short shouting that they've got it all wrong.

As for the dramas themselves, they illustrate, rather like *The Passion*, BBC nervousness and instinctive liberalism. Post-Hutton, they're too frightened to depict Blair, Bush or Campbell directly, so the emphasis is on plucky civil servants or MPs trying to stop the conflict. But the series is weakened by the suggestion that everyone against Blair was against the war from the start: a much more interesting drama would feature the politicians, journalists and soldiers who backed the attack and then changed their minds.

'Remote Controller'

MEDIA NEWS

ANOTHER week, another victory for citizen journalism at Sky News... As storms battered Britain at the beginning of last week, presenters on the rolling news channel begged viewers to "help us put together the fullest national picture possible" by sending in their photos of the damage.

Hundreds took up the invitation – including posters on the Football 365 web forum, who, finding that such pisspoor efforts as a shot of a watering can ("the wind blew it round all night") were being featured on the Sky website at yourphotos.sky.com, rose to the challenge and began to send in increasingly outlandish scenes created using photoshop and snaps lifted mostly from the rival BBC website.

By 11.30am on Tuesday, despite a solemn promise that "your photo will be checked by moderators before it can be displayed", the 408 photographs in Sky's "Wild Weather" gallery included a shot of a young Norman Wisdom dismayed by a car crushed by a tree; footballer Carlos Valderama in flooded New Orleans captioned "it's windy here in Widnes"; a still from environmental disaster movie *The Day After Tomorrow* captioned "Whitley Bay"; a suspicious number of scenes of destruction featuring either teddy bears or the athlete and television presenter Kris Akabusi; and several shots of fallen trees and flooded streets in which missing toddler Madeleine McCann was clearly visible in the background.

Sadly the fun was terminated after a mere 24 hours when moderators caught on and deleted all the images.

THANK goodness BBC News 24 was on hand to keep the nation informed during "the worst storms to hit Britain for decades".

First it went live to Simon Hall in Cornwall, "one of the worst affected areas". "At the moment it looks pretty calm," Hall reported as children gaily played football on the beach behind him.

And what did reporter John Kay then have to report? "It's sunny now and not as bad as it was this morning," he said with a glorious sunset bathing the sea in gold.

"AT GMTV there were those of us who wanted to make a decent TV programme and those who wanted to screw every last bit of cash out of the format they could," reminisced former presenter Eamonn Holmes in the *Observer* recently. "They know who they are."

They certainly do. One of them is Eamonn Holmes, who in 2005 demanded a 10 percent pay rise on his £450,000 salary to continue doing a three-day week on the GMTV sofa – and stormed off to *Sky News* when his bosses refused to grant it.

WHEN ITV1 broadcast its first show of the new Formula One season there was a new face in the presenting line-up alongside stalwarts such as Steve Rider.

The young reporter had been sent to the Dolomites to interview Ferrari drivers on their winter break and took to the task with enthusiasm. When Kimi Raikkonen told her this was only his third time skiing, her response was razor sharp. "That's incredible, that's amazing, that's really cool," she gushed.

And there was more. "I like skiing but I hate all the carrying of skis and the going up and the gloves and everything," she mused to the driver. "You really need a porter behind you carrying everything!" Who was this brilliant addition to ITV's reporting team? None other than Tamara Ecclestone, who happens to be the daughter of Bernie Ecclestone, billionaire owner of... Formula One!

I'D DO ANYTHING
TO GET ON TELEVISION
IN THIS LIFE, ONE THING COUNTS IN THE BANK LARGE AMOUNTS
"Please Sir, I want some more money"
xaalyra

DUMB BRITAIN

The Weakest Link, BBC2

Anne Robinson: What surname was shared by a historical outlaw called "Butch" and a fictional cowboy called "Hopalong"?
Contestant: Lesbian.
AR: Three stumps with two bails on top are essential equipment in which sport?
Contestant: Horse racing.
AR: Nelson's flagship HMS Victory was constructed mainly of which wood?
Contestant: Balsa.

2CR FM

Paul Bunker: Who was the Roman god of war? I'll give you a clue. It's a type of chocolate bar.
Caller: Twix.

BIRTSPEAK 2.0

"THE BBC has today launched a new version of bbc.co.uk for mobile devices. Building on the success of its existing market leading mobile browser proposition, the new version emulates the new appearance of the online version of bbc.co.uk. The new design offers a consistent and intuitive user experience with easier navigation.

"Matthew Postgate, BBC Controller of Mobile, said: 'In the coming months, our mobile proposition will develop significantly...' The launch of the refreshed mobile service will be supported by a four-week marketing campaign which will target football fans across the country with a number of TV, outdoor and ambient initiatives."

– Press announcement that the BBC website can now be seen on mobile phones

MATTERS are coming to a head in BBC radio current affairs, where all but one department have managed to avoid compulsory redundancy.

Staff suffering from the stress of the endless wait for the selection process to begin are finding that the confidential information they have passed on to counsellors (outsourced by the BBC to Crapita) is not actually confidential at all, but is passed to the very managers who will make the final decision about whom to sack.

Thus anyone who has confessed to any problems will find managers are already fully aware of their condition, despite the data protection act.

Worse still, fellow hacks are sending email reports about colleagues who may no longer be "top table" material, in the hope of saving their own miserable skins. Sackings – sorry, redundancy interviews – will begin next month.

WHAT a shame that Slummy Mummy and TV rent-a-gob Lowri Turner, a mum of three young children, missed the joys of Mothering Sunday.

She was far too busy pontificating about motherhood on Nicky Campbell's Sunday morning show, *The Big Question*. Meanwhile the kids were being looked after by their dads, Lowri's two ex-husbands.

SIX months after being forced out of the editor's chair at the *Sunday Telegraph*, does Patience Wheatcroft bear a grudge? Of course not.

Reviewing the papers on Radio 4's *Broadcasting House* last weekend, Wheatcroft ridiculed the *Sun Tel*'s splash about Tory plans not to cut taxes for four years, dismissing it as old news we'd all heard many times before.

When presenter Paddy O'Connell suggested the story in her old paper did have some merit as the Tory message on tax still hadn't got through, Wheatcroft refused to budge. "That," she declared expertly, "doesn't make it front-page news."

NUMBER CRUNCHING

£141,000 Shocking spend on bottled water per year by Hampshire county council, revealed by BBC's Panorama last month

£313,000 Shocking spend on bottled water per year by BBC in London and Glasgow

"A cross party Early Day Motion tabled by British pig industry supporter Richard Bacon MP – Tory MP for South Norfolk – will also call for the government's support for British pig farming."

BBC News website

AD NAUSEAM

SOMEWHAT predictably, the most talked-about, most lucrative advertising pitch of the year so far is for another government campaign.

The Department of Health is spending a whopping £75m on what it's calling the Healthy Weight, Healthy Lives anti-obesity drive. While we don't know its exact message yet, dare one predict that the gist will be "eat less, exercise more"?

The irony – that viewers will have to be sitting on their backsides watching telly in order to become aware of these facts – appears to have been lost on the government.

And which agencies have been shortlisted for the task? AMV, VCCP, M&C Saatchi and Wieden & Kennedy are all highly commendable choices: between the four of them they know a thing or two about what makes people obese. AMV does the ads for Walkers crisps, Guinness, Snickers, Frazzles, Mars bars and Maltesers; VCCP looks after Coca-Cola; M&C Saatchi pushes Kronenbourg and Foster's Lager; and Wieden + Kennedy promotes Pizza Hut. Is this the most apt example in history of having your cake and eating it?

"THIS bunch of unelected, self-appointed dimwits are clearly incapable of fairly and impartially ruling on advertising," announced Ryanair's head of communications in January.

The object of such ire? The Advertising Standards Authority, which had banned Ryanair's ad comparing cheap budget flights to the "hottest" schoolgirls (see *Eye* 1203).

Dim-witted the ASA may be, but that hasn't stopped Ryanair going running to the authority every time one of its competitors does something it objects to. The ASA has since banned the repetition of campaigns by both Easyjet and Jet2 – as a result of official complaints from Ryanair!

JUST what does Peter Bottomley, Tory MP for Worthing West, think about advertising junk food?

The MP signed up last month to Philip Davies' food industry-friendly early-day motion "strongly opposing attempts to introduce further restrictions on food advertising, which will do nothing to reduce obesity."

However, just three months earlier he also signed Nigel Griffiths' EDM welcoming "the forthcoming introduction of the Food Products (Marketing to Children) Bill that seeks to introduce a 9pm watershed for television advertising of unhealthy food."

Make your mind up Peter!

ALMOST a year has passed since Sky TV football presenter Andy Burton was convicted of violently assaulting former *Blue Peter* host Richard Bacon in a London pub, leaving him with black eyes, a broken nose and a split lip. Burton was given a two-year conditional discharge and ordered to pay £250 compensation to his victim.

"There's one thing this company must make clear – that there are limits," Rupert Murdoch once said, explaining why he had to sack a Fox TV executive who brought a stripper on stage at a conference. Burton has nevertheless kept his job at Sky. But has he learned to curb his loutishness?

After the Carling Cup final last month Andy was on the pitch for Sky Sports, asking Tottenham Hotspur captain Robbie Keane if it was the start of a new era for this great old club. What he omitted to mention was that only a few days earlier he'd put up a message on his Facebook page mocking one of Spurs' great old stars, Paul Gascoigne (who had just been sectioned under the mental health act), as a "retard with no chance of recovery".

Some people must have complained about the comment, as he has now removed it from his internet history. But his annoyance was clear the following week: "Andy would love to tell a few people to go and fuck themselves. But he's gonna keep a lid on it. For now..." Not for long. On 6 March, apparently after a row with a woman, out came the great clunking fist as he updated his Facebook status again: "Andy Burton is gonna punch you in the ovary. Straight-shot. Right to the baby maker." Charming!

Meanwhile, Andy's photo page on Facebook contains pictures of him with various celebrities, in three of which he is holding a clenched fist to their heads – a pose he clearly likes. He should tread carefully: that conditional discharge still has a year to run...

"The cat's finishing off your sudoku again!"

ROYAL MAIL's upcoming set of "endangered insects" stamps will rub salt in the wounds of wildlife protection charity Buglife, after a huge new mail depot was given the go-ahead on West Thurrock marshes last month.

Buglife (the Invertebrate Conservation Trust) asked the high court to quash permission for the Royal Mail distribution hub, on a site which is home to more than 1,000 species of birds, plants and insects, including 36 listed as rare species. But Mr Justice Mitting said that harm to biodiversity on the site would be "temporary".

The "Action for Species 2: Endangered Insects" stamps, out next month, feature 10 UK species currently recovering from being endangered, thanks to the efforts of wildlife conservation groups.

SUPERMODELS

KERBER

ROAD RAGE

Trucking hell

DESPITE pisspoor operating standards in road haulage, with satnav-guided lorries getting stuck on unsuitable roads or hitting bridges, civil servants in London and Brussels are doggedly trying to get even bigger trucks on to public roads.

In 2005 Stephen Ladyman, then a transport minister, blocked UK trials of 60- and 84-tonne trucks consisting of a tractor unit and two trailers (up to 101ft long). But mandarins still commissioned Prof Alan McKinnon of Heriot-Watt University and the Transport Research Laboratory to help produce a feasibility study, now overdue, on such trials. Transport secretary Ruth Kelly knew nothing of that study when asked about it at the last Labour conference.

One problem with double-articulated trucks is the space they need to negotiate turnings and roundabouts. Even if the drivers are well trained, other road users (including cyclists and pedestrians) had better watch out. There are vague suggestions that these monster trucks could be confined to motorways, but they'd still need to use other roads to reach depots and factories and during motorway closures.

The European road lobby reckons bigger trucks would benefit the environment and "lower fuel bills by carrying the same volume of goods with fewer vehicles". This echoes the conclusion of the Armitage inquiry into UK lorry weights in the early 1980s – since when, however, UK lorry traffic has actually *risen* despite several increases in maximum size and weight.

In the mid-1980s artics weighing more than 33 tonnes were more than 75 percent full on average: 20 years later they were less than 60 percent full. Haulage firms acquired the biggest possible lorries, in case the odd contract required those vehicles; but the overall result is more unused capacity trundling around congested roads.

A key official at the Armitage inquiry was John Berry. He's now a senior transport official at the European Commission, where he's helping drive forward consideration of international use of monster trucks – using the same assumptions that proved fallacious after the Armitage report. The commission doesn't like to be reminded that bigger trucks have previously failed to cut lorry traffic: when it held a seminar on longer lorries in Brussels on 4 March, opponents were sidelined and Germany's rejection of monster trucks after trials was ignored.

So how realistic will Prof McKinnon's monster-truck study for the government be? In 2000 the government's Commission for Integrated Transport (CfIT) predicted that raising maximum lorry weight to 44 tonnes could cut traffic "by around 100m vehicle-kilometers per year". In 2001 the government permitted 44-tonne trucks and between 2001 and 2004 – hey presto – lorry traffic *increased* by 1,300m vehicle-kms! And who provided the "detailed study of the likely effect of 44-tonne lorries on overall lorry mileage" for the CfIT's report? Step forward... Prof Alan McKinnon.

'Hedgehog'

SIGNAL FAILURES

Remedial class

MORE on transport secretary Ruth Kelly's "remedial" measures for First Great Western (see last *Eye*). She was going to claim they were "the best possible deal for passengers" until a spin doctor spotted her howler in time.

The *Eye* has seen the draft copy for last month's government statement about "improving performance" on FGW. It includes alterations made by mandarins before publication. These include padding out five vacuous bullet points describing the pathetic "passenger benefits" FGW will provide – eg lengthening Portsmouth to Cardiff trains to the size they were before shortening two years ago (against the advice of Hampshire county council and others: see *Eye* 1156). To make the list look more substantial, mandarins resorted to such waffle as: "Fares offers will commence from 1 April of this year until 31 March 2009."

The final press statement said FGW had breached its franchise agreement by misreporting cancellations. But a deleted part of the draft states: "First Great Western has contravened its franchise agreement twice" – once by misreporting and once by "exceeding the cancellations breach threshold in two periods". The rewrite made the excess cancellations seem less drastic.

The draft also has Kelly saying: "I have secured the best possible deal for passengers." Special adviser Julie Crowley realised that was too much spin even for New Labour and instead made Kelly say that the measures would "lead to a reduction in train cancellations and also provide a substantial package of benefits".

But what really would give passengers the best possible deal? Try ending the farce of civil servants attempting to manage a railway from Whitehall, and stop using FirstGroup as a protective shield – a set-up that keeps rail managers so busy discharging obligations to shareholders and officials that passengers remain bottom of the list. The best deal for passengers would also return assets to the public sector and create a state rail company to manage operations, maintenance and development. Managers, drivers, guards, station staff, signallers, timetable planners and train and track engineers would all belong to the same accountable organisation. Their prime duty would not be to maximise profits but to serve the public in the most cost-effective way for passengers and taxpayers.

This is how most major European railways function. It's also how British Rail provided a better service (without closing for maintenance on weekends and bank holidays) for around a quarter of today's subsidy and for fares that in real terms were much lower.

'Dr B Ching'

MEDICINE BALLS

Independence pay

GPs may have done well out of the NHS in the past few years, but at least they've hit their targets.

Independent sector treatment centres (ISTCs) – introduced to force hospitals into a competitive market – have also been paid well, but irrespective of their performance. In order to "encourage them into the market", ISTCs were given guaranteed contracts, paid above tariff, whether they did the work or not. And according to a document recently unearthed in the Commons library, the government has agreed to buy back the premises and contents of 14 ISTCs if the initial five-year contract isn't renewed.

This information was not unearthed by the Commons health select committee in 2006, when its report found ISTCs to be "of dubious value". In 2006-07, ISTCs were paid for 50,000 operations they didn't do, and many are still underused. ISTCs do have low levels of MRSA and very high patient satisfaction rates, but as waiting lists come down many will be unable to secure sufficient business to keep them viable.

So what will the NHS do with all these unwanted facilities it has to buy back? Turn them into Lord Darzi's polyclinics, perhaps.

ANOTHER expensive "New" Labour wheeze, NHS Direct (NHSD), is also having trouble attracting business, with calls down 7 percent on the previous year.

The service budgeted for 10.8m calls in 2007-08 but is now expecting 2.6m fewer. The charitable view is that patients are accessing the website instead, but NHSD is clearly desperate for business. The latest proposal is to phone people proactively with long-term conditions to see how they're doing. Be sure to have your answer ready.

ARE you ready for LINks? This appalling, partially capitalised acronym stands for Local Improvement Networks, the latest replacement for the axed community health councils.

CHCs were initially replaced by 394 patient and public involvement forums in 2004, overseen by a £100m Commission for Patient and Public Involvement in Health (CPPIH). Within six months, Labour decided to replace the forums with even better "public and patient engagement bodies" and the CPPIH has been a dead quango walking ever since.

The 150 LINks are supposed to be up and running on 1 April (*sic*), but their regulations have not yet been published in full, with no guidance on training, what access they will have to the NHS and what to do if they unearth some NHS disaster. Nor is it clear where they will be based. Each LINk has to select a local "host" from a list of preferred bidders, but it can't do this until its regulations are finalised. So very few LINks will exist in April.

Clearly it's a good idea for patients to be involved in improving NHS services, but the government seems hell-bent on making the process so complicated and inaccessible that it will kill off all but the most anal volunteers. CHCs were at least independent, irascible and not afraid to speak out. LINks, if they ever appear, are "to help the NHS meet its agenda of community engagement and the competencies of world-class commissioning".

I know which I'd prefer.

M.D.

ECO WORRIER

Brew Ha-ha

SHOULD we raise our glasses to the people at Stella who want to help save the planet with a new green "eco-can" made from recycled aluminium?

The initiative may not be much help to police and paramedics in city centres up and down the country who have to deal with the effects of binge drinking every weekend (less broken glass, perhaps?). But in a briefing seen by Eco Worrier, Stella asks its PR agency Edelman to propose launch plans for this "revolutionary" green initiative in order "to support reputation transformation".

And what reputation would Stella be wanting to transform?

For many years the company, part of the giant Interbrew empire, has passed the buck on responsible drinking, while the brew itself is known as "wife beater", its drinkers admitting that it makes them lose control. Could the green initiative be less about saving the planet perhaps and more about saving the brand, which ABC1 consumers deserted long ago because of its hopelessly chav image?

The company's claims to greenness will be a nice little earner for Edelman's latest hire, David Cameron's green adviser Jules Peck *(see Eye* 1204). But the Stella people aren't oblivious to the dangers. Amusingly the briefing document continues: "Please take into consideration PR risks around green washing." Quite so.

ROTTEN BOROUGHS

SUFFOLK AND SEE

THE appointment of Andrea Hill as chief executive of Tory Suffolk county council has raised eyebrows on account of the massive salary she will receive – at £220,000 it is 70 grand more than her predecessor was getting, £40,000 more than the job she leaves behind at Bedfordshire and £31,000 more than the prime minister.

Suffolk originally offered £176,000, but the yokels were persuaded by headhunters Odgers Ray and Berndtson that it was too measly to attract someone of "very special calibre". It's a smart move for Hill, not only because of the £18,000 a month, but also because she clinched the new job days after the government announced the abolition of Bedfordshire CC, which is to be scrapped for being useless and taken over by Bedford borough council – sorry, transformed into an exciting new "unitary" authority (*Eye* 1192).

Some in Bedfordshire see an irony here, given that under Hill's watch the council spent more than half a million quid on a pointless campaign to fight abolition and Hill was herself photographed holding a banner declaring "We Love Bedfordshire" before hurrying home to scour the job ads.

With BCC haemorrhaging departmental directors, Hill spent £300,000 on recruitment, including £25,000 on "psychometric testing" to ensure high-quality appointees. This doesn't appear to have stopped each council department losing its director at least once over the past two years, often after only a few months in harness.

At least Suffolk will get plenty of blue-sky thinking for its money. In 2006 Bedfordshire residents were accidentally given access to an internal council website, where they were treated to videos of top council officers delivering faltering monologues about "improvement journeys" and to a baffling essay from the Leaderene about the crucial role of something called "the sigmoid wave" in creating "continuous improvement". One appalled resident described it as "like something out of a brain-washing cult".

• Winter fuel payment up to £250m for over-60s and to £400 for over-80s

BBC News website

● SURREY county council has approved an application from Tarmac plc to build a mortar processing plant more than 110ft tall in the middle of the green belt near Godstone. The vote in favour of the plant, which has attracted strong local opposition, was 7-6. Quite a result, given that there were only 12 councillors present. On a show of hands the actual vote was 6-5 *against* the application, but dimwitted Tory planning committee chair Pat Frost counted it as 5-5. She then used her casting vote to make it 6-5 for. When one of the councillors who had voted against protested that her vote had not been counted, Frost gave the result as 6-6 – and then used a second casting vote to make it 7-6 in favour. Brilliant! Just don't let that woman anywhere near the finance committee.

DERBY DONKEYS

AN EARLY nomination for the Philistines of the Year category in the 2008 Rotten Boroughs awards comes from Derby, where the city council (DCC), with the connivance of the Arts Council, has pulled the plug on the city's theatre, the Derby Playhouse. Although the Playhouse was losing money [*a theatre? Shurely not – Ed*], its management had a recovery plan and could have carried on functioning had not the Arts Council suddenly cut off its funding – worth £2.3m over the next three years – and switched it to a new council-run arts body called "Derby LIVE" [*sic*], which will put on a-bit-of-this and a-bit-of-that at venues across the city, including the Playhouse.

One of the prime movers behind "Derby LIVE" is the council's "cabinet member for leisure and direct services", Alan Graves, who is coincidentally also a member of the East Midlands Arts Council – so no conflict of interest there. Graves's back-of-an-envelope calculations predict 330,000 people attending events, which will raise £2.5m by next year. Oh yeah?

The Arts Council reckoned the Playhouse board's own recovery plan was "too risky" because the theatre's lease would risk being sold to pay off creditors if it failed. But that, fear the Playhouse's supporters, is exactly what will happen when Graves's "extremely exciting" scheme flops.

The theatre's freehold, gifted to the council in 1975, was sold by DCC in 1991 to a property company, with the council retaining a 299-year lease and sub-letting the building to the Playhouse. The freehold was sold on to Australia's Westfield Group, the world's biggest retail property developers in 2000. Last year Westfield opened a giant shopping centre that now dwarfs the adjoining theatre. It contains two department stores and a third one would fit nicely on the theatre site.

PS: The Playhouse's other creditors, who wanted to keep it going, are to challenge the Arts Council's decision in the high court this week.

CURRYING FAVOUR

LAST year we reported how Bradford BNP councillor Paul Cromie had attempted to bribe pensioners into voting for the fascists by putting fivers in Christmas cards (*Eye* 1190). So it's good to see that councillors of other political persuasions are pioneering innovative ways to engage voters, too.

A campaign leaflet from Rochdale Lib Dem councillor Zulfiqar Ali offers voters a 10 percent discount at his clothes shop, Stone Design Wear ("Shirts £7.99!"), upon production of the handout. Labour's Ibrar Khan says: "It is a sign of how desperate Councillor Zulf Ali is that he's offering financial inducements to voters to try and win this election. If he weren't standing for election, would he be offering this discount?"

A fair question – and one Cllr Khan might be better placed than most to answer. Last year he distributed an election leaflet offering free curries, "cooked by a superb chef", to residents of a sheltered housing complex in his ward!

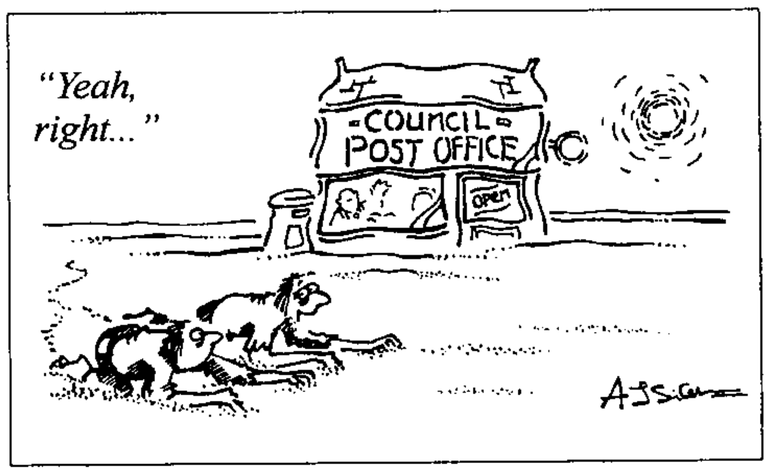
CRYSTAL MYTH

BACK in 1997 Channel 4's *Brass Eye* embarrassed celebs including Noel Edmonds, Rolf Harris and Sir Bernard Ingham by duping them into condemning a fictitious drug called "Cake".

Now Staffordshire county council has followed in their footsteps by forwarding an email to all 1,700 addresses in the council's youth services department's book – schools, public bodies and individuals – warning of the danger of "strawberry meth", a potentially lethal drug disguised in sweets. According to the email, it's on sale in playgrounds and also comes in chocolate, peanut butter, cola, cherry, grape and orange flavours.

It is, of course, a hoax, thought to have originated in the US, which has been circulating in Britain for months. Most councils and police forces have ignored it. Most, but not all. Earlier this month, Thames Valley police apologised after sending a warning about the nonexistent scourge to 80 schools in the Oxford area, some of which then held special assemblies to alert children to the "danger".

● NEARLY two years ago the *Eye* reported on Tower Hamlets planning department's unsympathetic response to residents who complained when Countryside Properties built a new development on behalf of the Swan Housing Association in the wrong place, blocking out their light. One officer told the occupants of Rainhill Way, Bow: "If you want to look at green spaces, move to the country." Another claimed it was an "urban myth" that planning permission was required for all new building work (*Eye* 1168). But the *Eye* predicted that Swan would have to demolish the unlawful building unless an appeal to a government planning inspector was successful. Well, it wasn't, and down they must come. Er, *Eye* told you Bow!



IT'S GRIM UP NORTH LONDON

KNIFE & PACKER

A COMMENT BOX IS A GREAT WAY OF MAINTAINING RELATIONS
NOTHING NEEDS TO FESTER, ISSUES CAN BE RAISED
I CAN'T BELIEVE RAFAEL HAS CRITICISED YOUR BÉARNAISE SAUCE, APPARENTLY IT: "LACKED BOTH WIT AND JOIE DE VIVRE"!
HE'LL NEVER DINNER PARTY HERE AGAIN!!!
SLIPS
COMMENTS
SLIPS
COMMENTS

EDUCASHUN NEWZ

SWELTERING, stuffy classrooms at dozens of newly-built schools in Glasgow will have to be refitted after health and safety inspectors backed teachers' complaints.

More than 300 drama, home economics and computer classrooms across 29 schools will have to be retrofitted with ventilation systems by Glasgow city council and its public private partnership (PPP) partner 3ED. The split of the cost has not yet been agreed.

Pupils and teachers have been complaining for five years that the new classrooms are too hot, but Scottish teachers' union EIS says its complaints were dismissed as "ideological opposition" to PPP. After visiting just two of the schools, the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) found five workplace safety breaches.

NOOKS and CORNERS

HARTLEBURY Castle has been one of the houses of the Bishop of Worcester since the middle of the 13th century, but this means nothing to the Church Commissioners who have abandoned this ancient and most beautiful country residence.

It is wrong, they say, for a bishop to live in a palace when clergy in poor parishes struggle to survive. Besides, these old buildings cost money to maintain – perhaps £9m a year – so away with them: sell them off and let the bish and his wife live in a nice modern house like everyone else.

But does anyone really imagine bishops live in palatial luxury? Usually these worthy prelates occupy a small, modernised part of the historic houses which, along with cathedrals and parish churches, are the traditional glory of the Church of England. Other parts are used as offices, or for diocesan events, or are open to the public or let out to generate an income.

Bishop Hurd's Library at Hartlebury

However, just as they have sold off countless fine vicarages (which are then resold at huge profit by someone else: they are financially inept), the commissioners insist that a bishop living in an old palace presents the wrong image for the modern C of E. One by one, they are trying to get rid of these tiresome old buildings when a bishop retires.

They recently tried this with Rose Castle in Cumberland, residence of the Bishops of Carlisle since the 13th century, but the bishop and locals were opposed, so the governing body of the Church Commissioners backed away. Until the next time.

Then there is the Bishop's Palace at Bishop Auckland, the hunting residence of the Bishops of Durham since the 12th century. This is large, old and magnificent, and used for all sorts of purposes while the park is open to the public. But it costs money to run and a few years ago the commissioners tried to flog the set of 17th century Spanish paintings by Zurbaran. They were thwarted, so now are looking forward to 2010 when the present bishop retires to see if they can get rid of it altogether.

But those bishops who have both a sense of community and duty seem to like these buildings. Nobody could accuse the new Archbishop of York, John Sentanu, of presenting the wrong image – after all, he is black and appears regularly on television. But he insisted on moving back to the palace out at Bishopsthorpe – abandoned by his predecessor – into a newly modernised flat there.

Alas, with Hartlebury Castle the commissioners have had their way, thanks to the last Bishop of Worcester, Peter Selby, who was a commissioner who argued that the residences of bishops should be reviewed when they reach the age of 63.

Hartlebury is some ten miles north of Worcester. It is medieval in part but was largely rebuilt in the 17th and 18th centuries. Approached by a lime avenue planted in the 17th century, and with its old moat, Hartlebury presents, as Pevsner wrote, "a deliciously peaceful sight".

Until recently, the bishop lived in apartments created in the 1960s while one wing has been occupied as the Worcestershire County Museum since 1966. The chapel, a remarkable Gothick interior by Henry Keene, was abandoned by Bishop Selby. Another glory of the house is Bishop Hurd's Library, created in the 1780s. The magnificent collection is important, and some of the books were given by King George III, who was a friend and came to stay. Needless to say, the wretched Selby tried to get rid of the books and disband the Friends of Hurd's Library. Happily the Friends have revived, and Lord (Douglas) Hurd, an indirect descendant of the learned bishop, has become patron.

Bishop Selby's successor is obliged to live in a Victorian house close to the cathedral. This was a building which had once belonged to the Dean & Chapter, but had been sold off. It has now been bought back, restored and modernised at a cost of around £1.6m. The Church Commissioners, on the whole a cosy bunch of mediocre businessmen and Freemasons, pride themselves on their financial acumen, but Hartlebury Castle has been valued at no more than £1.3m and, besides, it will be difficult to sell while there is 19 years to run on the lease of the County Museum. Bishop Selby came up with an inappropriate scheme to convert Hartlebury into flats, but English Heritage was opposed. So moving the Bishop of Worcester out of his historic home has cost the Church of England a great deal of money. Apart from the museum wing, it now stands empty, and we must hope that this grade I listed building is being maintained and kept secure – all at a cost – especially as Bishop Hurd's library is still inside, along with the collection of portraits of bishops, for the Church Commissioners have not come up with any plan for the historic – and valuable – chattels in the house. Meanwhile the Hereford & Worcester Gardens Trust is concerned about the neglect of the park.

The commissioners' policy towards bishops' palaces in general and Hartlebury Castle in particular is a denial of the church's wider responsibilities to communities and to England's history. An historic, national church would maintain bishops' palaces as a matter of course; but to treat libraries and historic buildings, and eight centuries of history, with indifference confirms the C of E is retreating into a mere sect – and a Philistine one at that.

'Piloti'

Church Notices

At the evening service tonight, the sermon topic will be "What is Hell?" Come early and listen to our choir practice.

From the Spring 2008 Honor Oak Park Residents' Association Community Newsletter

MUSIC & MUSICIANS

THOSE who shuffle into church this Easter for a spot of resurrection cheer might be amused to find a not so subtle undercurrent of hostility zapping between the organ loft and vicar's stall.

It's nothing new: it's there in Thomas Hardy. But it's heating up again after a curious employment tribunal decision last month apparently awarded organists the kind of job protection no one previously thought they had.

What made this decision so curious was that it was shrouded in secrecy, with nothing to identify the church or the organist and not much about the kind of contractual relationship they had.

A lot of organists, many of whom battle weekly with clergy keen to replace them with rock bands and Cliff Richard tapes, are taking the decision as a call to arms. Though they don't exactly have militant representation as yet, there's potential in an interesting venture that played a key role in the tribunal proceedings.

Cloaked by the innocent name of Organist Publications Ltd (OPL), it is in fact a firebrand cell-group run by an organist/lawyer and an organist/chartered accountant.

OPL has assumed a spokesman's role, insisting that the tribunal decision means organists are now entitled to six weeks' holiday a year, a minimum wage, redundancy payments and maternity leave.

Given that the average organist works half a day a week, earns £40 and is male, this might seem a bit of a joke.

In fairness, OPL isn't without a sense of humour of its own. Among its publications is a wry dictionary of ecclesiastical usage that defines "clergy" as "those who wish to serve the church but are not clever enough to play the organ". Very droll.

But not, alas, as hilarious as the true story of what happened at an evening to which the born-again bankers of a fashionably evangelical London church had been encouraged to bring potential converts. Standing in front of a microphone and surrounded by the detritus of the parish rock band, the vicar asked, rhetorically, what the best thing was about that church. He then pointed to the organ. "And do you know what's so good about it?" he continued, warming to his theme. "It doesn't work!"

Applause and cheers erupted from the audience. It isn't hard to understand why organists are getting tough.

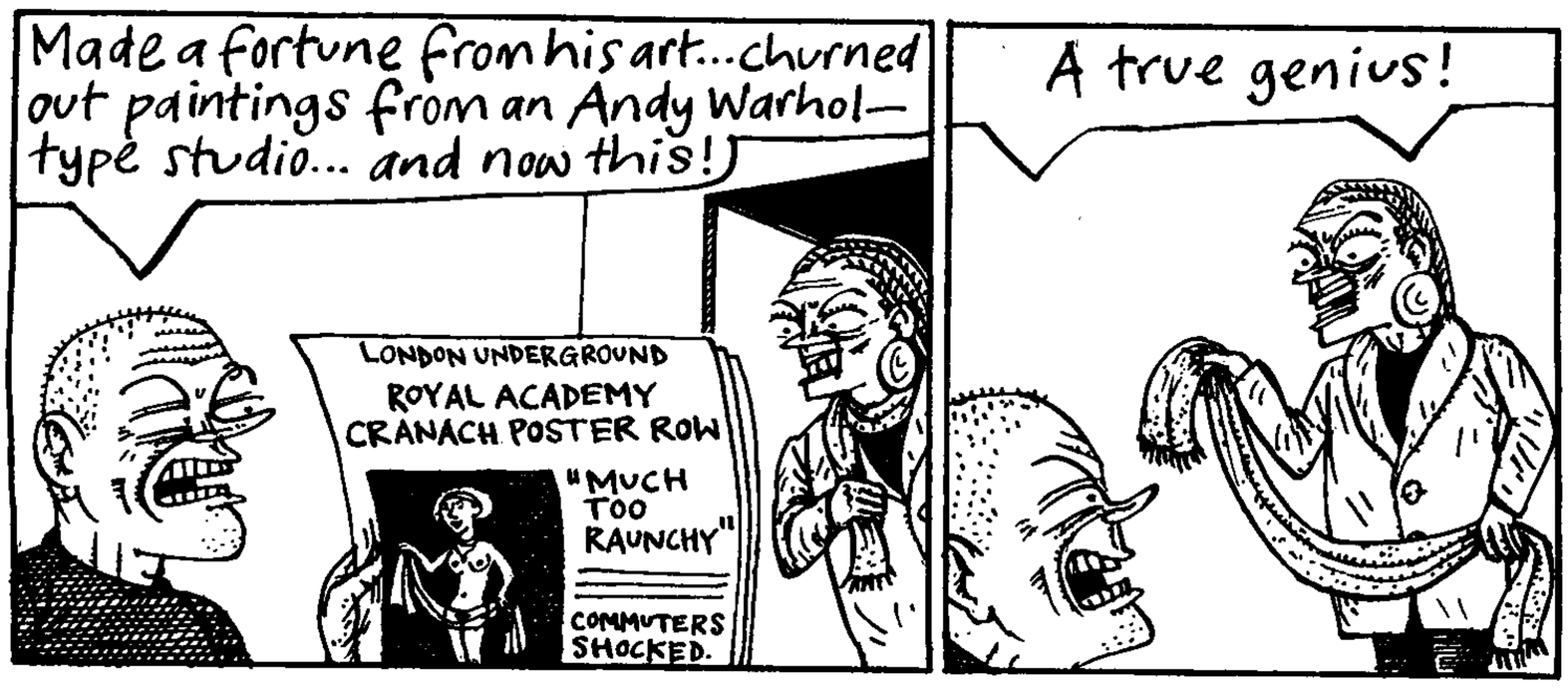
'Lunchtime O'Boulez'

But many of his clergy and parishioners were angered by his decision to take the Rev Mandy Williams-Potter, his chaplain, on a mission to Uganda last year.

Daily Telegraph

YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS

BY BIRCH


Made a fortune from his art...churned out paintings from an Andy Warhol–type studio... and now this!
LONDON UNDERGROUND
ROYAL ACADEMY
CRANACH POSTER ROW
"MUCH TOO RAUNCHY"
COMMUTERS SHOCKED.
A true genius!

Letters

Windsor soup

Sir,

As a long-time fan of the Eye, I have seen the highs and lows achieved over the years. The highs are the in-depth, no-holds-barred investigative journalism plus marvellous up-to-date cartoons.

Then for reasons I cannot fathom you start scraping the bottom of the barrel – such as the scurrilous attacks on many pages both in word and cartoon on Prince Harry and his service in Afghanistan.

I realise that the Royal Family are an easy target – damned if they do, damned if they don't. This is no reason why you should join the cheap tabloids.

In the case of Prince Harry there is banality, malice, spite and vitriolic attacks bordering on personal cruelty. The bulk of coverage in the media was a sort of feeding frenzy – five percent fact and 95 percent speculation and garbage – why you joined in baffles me.

You portrayed his service as no more than a PR stunt.

The articles and cartoon were drawn up by Eye staff, no doubt, from a safe and cosy bar far from Kabul and Helmand Province.

You can and should do better.

DON ROBERTS,

The Wirral.

Capital observation

Sir,

Is the Barclays Wealth whose sensitive connection with Liechtenstein – so rudely disclosed by Slicker (Eye 1205) – the same Barclays Wealth with a full page ad on the inside cover of the same issue?

*I sometimes wonder of the Eye's interminable **danse macabre** with global capital who is taking the piss out of whom.*

I like their slogan though – presumably aimed at potential clients – "Wealth. What's it to you?" Say it with a sneer and it could be aimed at the rest of us.

MARTIN KENNEDY,

London W1.

Gooding two-shoes

Sir,

It's concerting when an established wit such as the Eye demonstrates to our unrefined youth the subtle joys of a well crafted put down. Remote Controller supplied a fine example with his verdict on the new Lily Allen show when, having chastised Ms Allen for her lame attempts at humour, i.e. calling Cuba Gooding Jnr a twat (which, although factually correct is not the most sophisticated jibe) concluded that her show was "wank, wank, wank" – a quip worthy of Wilde shurely, or indeed Cuba Gooding Jnr?

TYLER CHINNICK,

Via email.

"Never let it be said that we ignore the spiritual element of Easter..."

In praise of tosh

Sir,

*As one of the judges that granted **Score For A Hole in The Ground** the PRS New Music Award (Eye 1204) I was disappointed to see Lunctime O'Boulez describe it as "complete tosh: vacuous, sensationalist tosh", and I feel that anyone who was not moved by a brisk walk through Kingswood Forest to experience the piece in its stunning location must have a heart of stone.*

Mr O'Boulez goes on to suggest that traditional ensembles like London Mozart Players and City of London Sinfonia, who have both lost their entire Arts Council Funding, ought to pursue spurious interests in such contemporary tosh to survive. I am sure this is news, for example, to the venerable London Musicians' Collective, which has also just lost its entire Arts Council funding, despite a thirty year history of developing superb vacuous tosh at grass roots level.

The fact is the government's Olypmic-sized 38% cut in arts funding affects us all, whether we like stand-up comedy, experimental theatre, vacuous tosh, or endless reinterpretations of the musical works of dead white males, and it's time to get the wagons in a circle rather than indulge in petty, ignorant factionalism like some kind of twat.

I will be cancelling the subscription I don't have and making an audio document of me doing so in the hope of securing a million pound handout.

STEWART LEE,

London N16.

Lookalike

Sam The Eagle **Darling**

Sir,

I always knew our new Chancellor was a complete and utter Muppet...

ENA B. FARRIMOND,

London W1.

Politicians stripped bare

Sir,

Your strip cartoons, "Dave Snooty and His Pals" and "The Broon-ites", publicise the Conservative Party and the Labour Party, but what about the Liberal Democrats?

Remembering Bill Tidy's strip cartoon of yesteryear, I should like to suggest "The Cleggies".

Yours faithfully,
J. ALAN SMITH,

Epping, Essex.

Burning issue

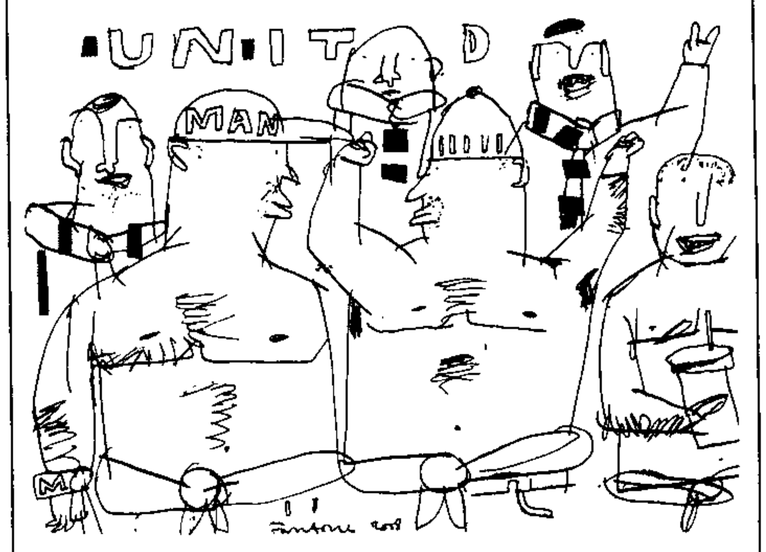
Sir,

Over 50 schools a year badly damaged by arson, costing some £74 million (Educashun, Eye 1205) certainly shows the need for sprinkler systems. Also useful would be more prosecutions and tougher penalties for arson, which in view of the unpredictable nature of fire should be treated as one of the most serious crimes.

FRANCIS KNOX,

London SW17.

Scenes You Seldom See



"Would you mind if I put my shirt back on, Dave? I'm freezing..."

Mistaken identity

Sir,

Years, years I've been trying to get in Street of Shame; then when it happens, it's such a let-down....

Yes, it was my voice, on The World This Weekend on Alan Johnson's donor problem (Eye 1203). However, the dull truth is the BBC had taken an extract from a recorded interview the previous night with me and, by mistake, credited our reporter Adrian Butler. Sadly on this occasion I am not guilty of "masquerading" as one of the paper's reporters as you reported. But it's a thought for the future.

Yours,
NICK BUCKLEY,

Head of News, Sunday Mirror.

Bishop prick

Sir,

Good to see Piloti's report on the lastest East End land grab (Eye 1203), but just to point out that he got his Bishops confused. "Bishops Square" is Hammerson's Fosters development which after major public opposition destroyed over half the Spitalfields Market buildings to build offices. "Bishops Place" is their more recent Fosters scheme and entails the needless demolition of the Light Bar, a Shoreditch landmark. And to be fully joined-up the "Bishops Quarter" will apparently cover a further eleven spare acres with a forest of towers up to fifty storeys high.

While Hammerson et al are ogling the figures, in scenes worthy of The Directors, the "Bishops" brand (though certainly controversial) doesn't chime in the neighbourhoods next to the City. Given that Ken and our local councils are complicit in the plans for giant shadows and shopping malls, residents can only hope for some form of divine intervention.

Yours,
LUCY ROGERS,

Bethnal Green E2.

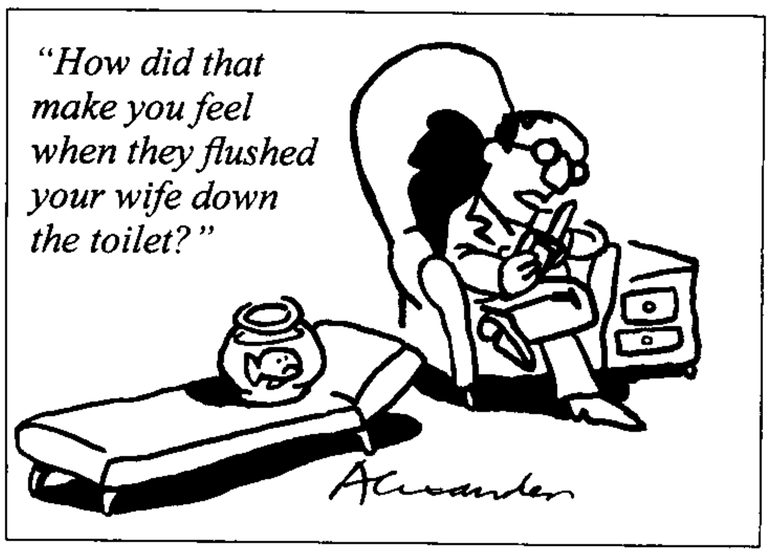
In the swim

Sir,

Re Victoria Baths, Nottingham (Nooks & Corners, 1205). This article was brilliant and not least because it included reference to the other recent staggering balls-up by NCC [Nottingham City Council]; the Market Square "transformation". Piloti and readers may be interested to know the provenance of the granite used for this... it came all the way from China!!

Best wishes,
HILARY GARLAND,

Nottingham.



Bags of fun

Sir,

Much as I like you to point out the Mail's (many) failings need I remind you that your subscribed organ comes wrapped in a translucent plastic bag? Which naturally leads me NOT to renew my own subscription when it runs out. I'll just buy it from the corner shop instead.

Yours in traction,
CAMERON KERR,
Via email.

Thai source

Sir,

Your Own Correspondent in Bangkok referred to the PM of Thailand (Eye, 1205) as a "TV chief" but it should have been "chef", as he really did while away some time with his hand out of the till by showing people how to make some popular Thai dishes - think of John Prescott doing Delia Smith impressions and you'll get the idea.

Yours,
JOHN BOLEY,
Via email.

Medicine Balls balls?

Sir,

"Old hat and wrong" (Medicine Balls, Eye 1025): how is such a thing possible? Well, the august Eye could have helped readers make up their own minds about antidepressant efficacy by pointing to the original data (Kirsch et al, PLoS Medicine 5(2): e45), rather than over-hyped news stories, but that's not really the point here.

Dr Balls seems to be in a bit of a pickle over the placebo effect, saying "they [antidepressants] do work for mild and moderate depression, but not significantly better than placebo". Kirsch's meta-analysis in fact failed to find a clinically relevant response to antidepressants for most patients with mild to moderate depression. However, M.D. does seem to get things right in the end – the law now needs to be changed to make sure that the results of all trials are made publicly available.

As the wheels of politics grind on, pharmaceutical companies might like to know that the Public Library of Science journal PLoS ONE provides a forum for publication of all correctly conducted and reported clinical trials, irrespective of outcome.

Yours hopefully,
EMMA VEITCH, PHD
Associate Editor, PLoS Medicine.

Social security

Sir,

Re Paul Lynch's letter (Eye 1025) complaining at your treatment of child care social workers in a recent cartoon. I have been a qualified social worker for 21 years, and have acted as a child care social worker, amongst other things, in that time. Frankly, bad decisions are made for a whole number of reasons – lack of funding, minimal resources, poor training opportunities – all of which add up to the fact that often social workers and their decisions are not good enough...

As a social worker who is currently trying hard to keep learning disabled parents and their kids together in the face of often dodgy social work decisions, I need a laugh and I thought your cartoon was very funny. (I showed it to everyone at work.) Double my subscription immediately!

JON WRIGHT,
Supported Lives, Bradford, West Yorks.

Lookalike

Cartoon character

Senior Republican

Sir,

Is it me or does John McCain look more and more like Popeye The Sailor these days?

GREGORY BRENNAN,
Liverpool.

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

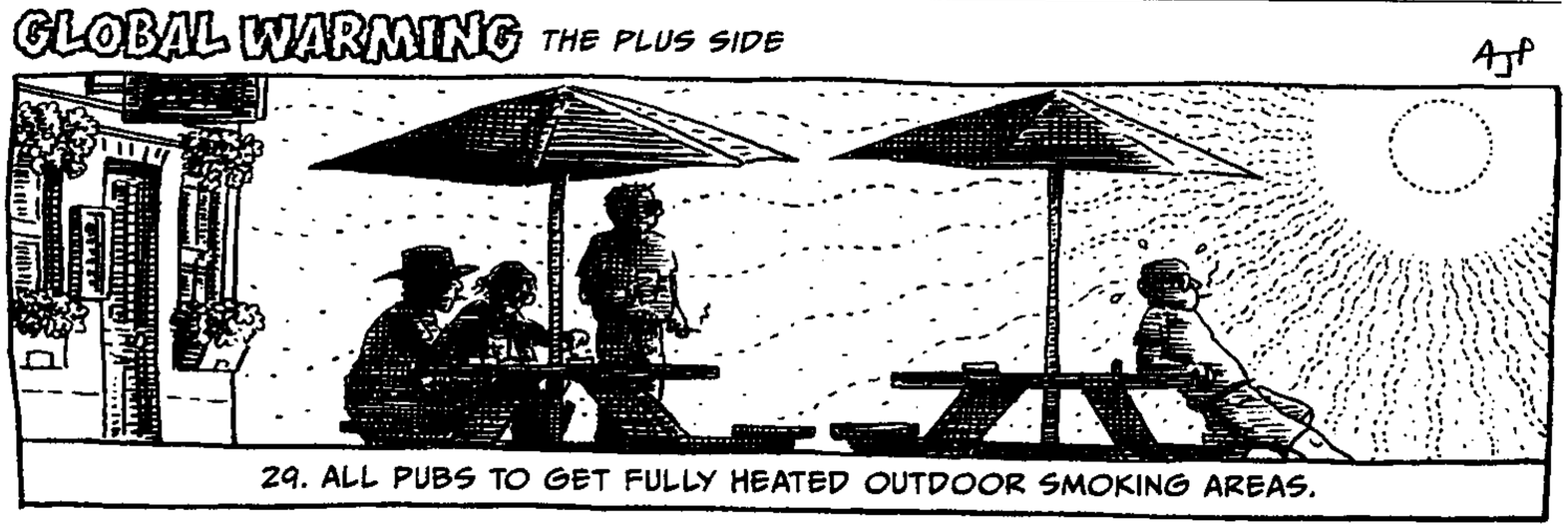
"It's accepted practice for the batsman to get between himself and the fielder..."
TONY GREIG
(Stuart McMahon)

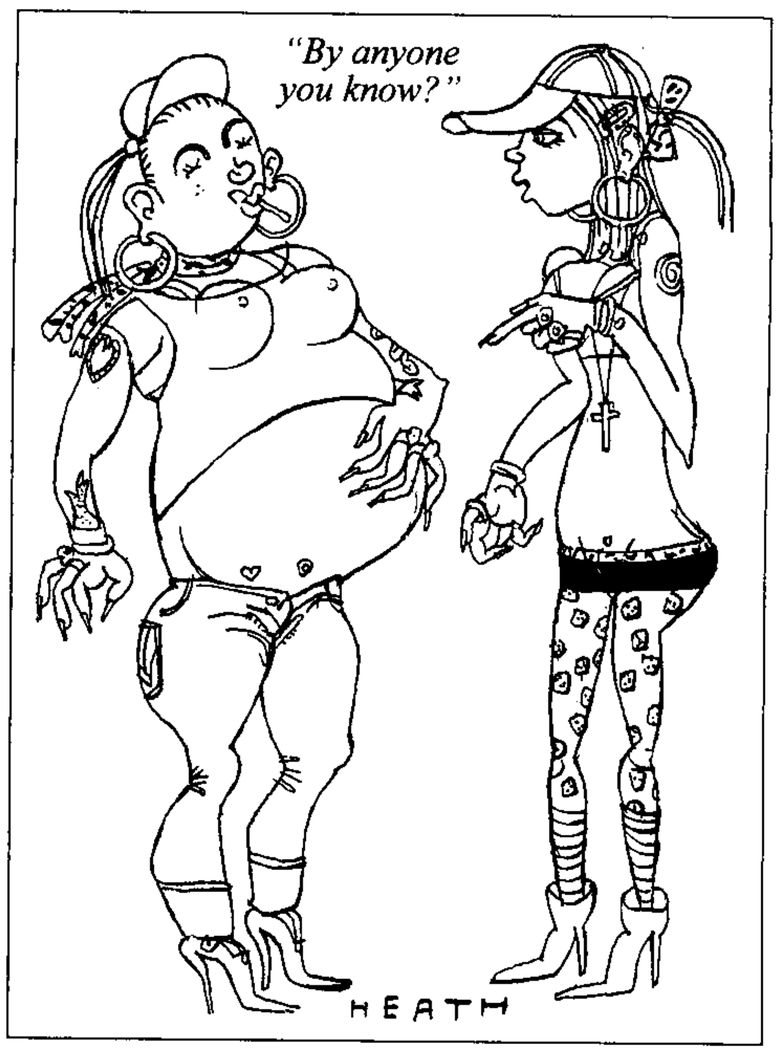
"Cheap cider's a hot potato..."
RUSSELL FULLER, Radio 5 Live
(Peter Quinn)

"And so the status quo is pretty much as it was..."
JEFF STELLING, Sky Sports 1
(Gordon Aitken)

"It's water off a duck's back – you have to take it on the chin."
KEVIN KEEGAN
(Jay Collins)

"There's always going to be a few bad eggs in a barrel."
ROGER DALTREY, BBC
(Mike Forte)





P'edants Corner

... The assertion in "Global Warming: The Plus Side" (Eye 1205) that mountains will get taller when released from the weight of glaciers is incorrect. If the height of mountains is measured from the mean sea level, then, because that level is raised through the melting of glaciers as a consequence of global warming, mountains will, in fact, be getting shorter.

I promise to go out and get a life after I post this...

CHARLES E. NOAD.

... Welcome though the correction to the King Lear quote in Graeme Keyes' cartoon is, the more pertinent one is that Madness was never a Northern Soul band. They came from Camden Town and played Ska, so the caption should read "Hi, I'm looking for some 'North London Ska'. Is it this way?" "Noooo. Not that way. That way Madness lies!!!"

SIMON WILLIAMS.

... I thoroughly applaud your use of the specific fighter plane in the "Broon-ites" cartoon in issue 1205 – the English (unlike Broon) Electric (ditto) Lightning (again) is a long-defunct front-line aircraft, thoroughly suited to your Broon-ites theme.

IAN DOCWRA.

... "Apparently" by Mike Barfield (Eye 1205), warned of Starling Swarms: A cautionary tale. Of course the correct collective noun for starlings is a murmour [sic]!

MARY HINGE.

... In Clarissa Eden's diary (Eye 1205) she mentions sitting down to dinner next to Hitler. The meal consisted of venison stew and potatoes. Eny fule no that Hitler was a vegetarian and any chef dim enough to serve meat to the Fuhrer was likely to have his toenails removed by the Gestapo for such an insult.

EDWARD WINDSOR-HIMMLER.

... The entertaining Ballad of Speaker Martin (Eye 1205) in Scots dialect was sadly marred by an error revealing the RP spoken by its no doubt publicly schooled author. In a Scottish accent "class" does not rhyme with "arse", owing to the short "a" of the former and the pronounced "r" of the latter.

It would however have rhymed with "ass", thus preserving the joke. Perhaps the only Scottish thing about Sir William Rees-McGonagall is the pseudonym?

DANIEL BELL.

Letter from **George Town**
from Our Own Correspondent

THE sun still shines on this outpost of empire but these are troubled times. With our much admired tolerance for all things secret, Cayman Islands has become a country with more registered companies than people. But our corporate friends are not happy.

In the past few weeks the *Guardian* reheated the old story (see *Eye* 1180) about Tesco using our tropical home to dodge hundreds of millions in British taxes; and the *Boston Globe* accused US defence contractor Kellogg Brown & Root of using Cayman shell companies to dodge hundreds of millions of dollars in Federal Medicare and social security payments.

Meanwhile Barack Obama thinks we are a haven for thieves and cheats. He found time on the campaign trail to mention Ugland House, here in George Town, which is home to lawyers Maples & Calder and more than 12,000 of their brass plaque company clients: "That's either the biggest building or the biggest tax scam on record," he said. Ugland house is about the size of a modest boutique hotel.

We could compete for discretion even with the most anonymous of tax havens. We cancelled our double taxation treaties in 1969. Rare indeed would be the snooping tax investigator able to unravel our STAR trusts and local nominee companies. But times are changing. Liechtenstein has taken to washing its dirty linen and our secrecy laws are also being breached. Earlier this month Julius Baer Holding, a Swiss bank, abandoned legal action in the US after losing a battle to stop website Wikileaks from posting details of account holders at the bank's Grand Cayman branch. Favoured clients worry about how safe our banks now are and wonder if any whistleblowers are lurking. There are certainly plenty of people ready to listen. This month Washington sent a team from the Government Accountability Office. US Senators and British MPs are also interested in paying us a visit.

They could be in luck. For despite what appears to be an extraordinarily prosperous country, many of us are not doing so well at all. GDP per head is over $43,800, about the same as the US and better than the UK. Bank deposits – nearly $2 trillion of them! – add up to four times the total deposits in all banks in New York City. But ours is a deeply divided society. Some of us earn just $3 an hour; and for many of us, buying a property remains a bitter fantasy. How many people, we now wonder, might be tempted to enjoy an additional lump sum for selling on secret bank data?

And don't expect any help from our politicians. There was a time when Kurt Tibbetts called for social justice and an end to financial apartheid in Cayman Islands. But in those days he was in opposition. Now he is Leader of Government Business, squirming as he justifies all he used to hold as wrong. Money, it seems, still talks.

This is not some exotic problem from far away. Helping companies dodge taxes is one thing. But we have plenty more to contribute. In years past, while world markets were strong, our pisspoor regulatory system actually helped cause global mayhem. Enron hid billions in losses using 441 Cayman affiliates; Cayman was the nominal home to Long-Term Capital Management, whose collapse in 1998 caused world markets to tremble. Parmalat used Cayman falsely to claim $5bn in bank deposits it did not have.

More recently two Cayman-registered Bear Stearns hedge funds collapsed, sending world markets tumbling. That was in the good times. Now the subprime crisis is upon us, just think what damage we might do! The finance industry has screwed up many Cayman Islanders' lives. But at least we can drag everyone else down with us!

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY **VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH**

● "At first I felt frustrated when the ban on smoking in bars and restaurants came into force," Michael Windisch told reporters in his Maltermeister Turm gaststätte in Goslar, Lower Saxony, "because many of my customers like to smoke during a meal. We Germans must always obey the law, but it seemed unfair, and I started wondering if there was a way that my diners could continue to smoke without always having to stand outside in the cold. That's when I came up with the idea of the Smoking Hole, so they could legally enjoy a cigarette without even having to leave their seats.

"The outer walls of my restaurant are wooden, so I took my saw and cut three

circular holes, just above one of the dining tables. The large one in the middle is for the customer's head, and the smaller ones on either side are for his hands. When patrons want to smoke, they simply put their head and hands through the holes, and they can then light up without fear of prosecution, because their mouth, hands, and cigarette are all outside in the open air. And after they've finished, they pull this curtain over the holes to keep out the cold, and continue with their meal." *(Der Spiegel, 20/12/07. Spotter: Brendan Joseph O'Byrne)*

● TwoDaLoo – a Supertoilet That Saves Rocky Marriages and The Planet.

The TwoDaLoo is the world's first toilet specifically designed for two people to use at the exact same time. Featuring two side-by-side toilet seats, joined by a single cistern, it brings couples closer together and conserves our water supply, all with one flush.

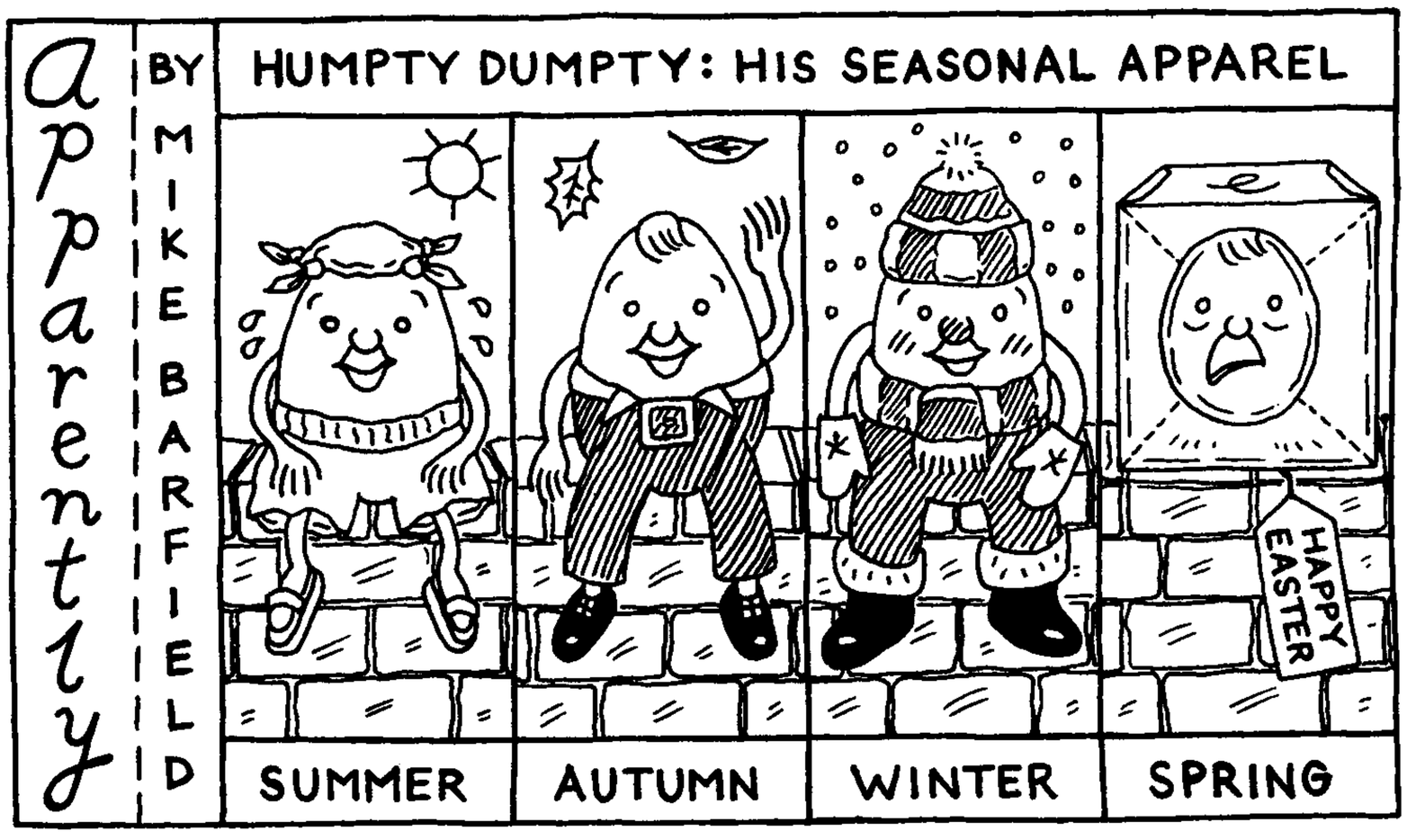
Our research indicates that 36% of the population already go to the toilet in front of their partner, and our product takes this process one stage further, by turning the toilet into relationship therapy. When you are at your most relaxed, that is the best time for you to communicate with your partner, discuss your concerns, and learn from them to grow as a couple. And because it saves water by using one flush for two, you can fight global warming and divorce at the same time.

The TwoDaLoo retails at $1,400, and is available through Home Depot, Sharper Images, Brookstone, and other leading retailers. An upgraded version with seven-inch LCD television and iPod docking station is also available. (San Francisco Chronicle, 8/12/07. Spotter: Peter Owen)

– ● –

● "Ever since work began on the Retrench Village construction site, small amounts of building materials had been vanishing," Uric Birbal of the Trinidad and Tobago Housing Development Corporation told reporters. "At first it was just a few bricks or a bag of cement, but the losses eventually ran into several hundred dollars, so we felt that something had to be done. We thought about hiring a twenty-four-hour security firm, but that would have been far too expensive, and investing in a two-hundred-foot fence seemed a better option. But unfortunately, the fence we put up to keep the thieves out was stolen on the very night we erected it.

"In retrospect, we probably should have kept guard on that first night, because the concrete around the posts had not fully hardened when we finished work. Even so, it must have taken a large team of robbers all night to dig up thirty-six steel posts, roll up all the fencing, and carry it away on a pick-up truck before dawn. The fence and posts cost over $15,000, and police say that the thieves will probably have already melted them down and resold them as raw materials. In future, we'll just leave the construction site open, and let the thieves steal what they want. That's far cheaper than trying to protect the materials." *(Trinidad & Tobago Express, 22/11/07. Spotter: Neil Sadler)*



PRIME MINISTERIAL DECREE NO. 17

From the Desk of the Supreme Leader

Comrades,

I have today decided that there will be an official, independent inquiry into the ill-fated Neo Imperialist Adventure into Iraq which will find that the blame for this shameful fiasco lies solely with the disgraced former leader Comrade Blair. It will also find how other members of Blair's politburo were deliberately kept in the dark and wilfully misled about the nature of this act of warmongering BushoRumsfeldism. In the unlikely event that this is not the finding of the Inquiry, publication may have to be deferred to the year 2030.

Meanwhile, let us all congratulate Comrade Darling on his masterly and much-acclaimed five-year plan for economic stability and a stable economy within a framework of economical stabilisation. Comrade Darling outlined this plan in a 50-hour speech to assembled delegates, which was greeted by appreciative and spontaneous silence.

The Chancellor is to be commended for the inspiring manner in which he set out my vision for the way ahead, but let us be clear – brilliant as Comrade Darling's presentational skills may be, he would be the first to acknowledge that every detail in the 68,000 word summary of the main points in his budget was both approved by myself and indeed written by myself.

Let me therefore remind you all of the key points in this epoch-making statement of Brownite-Darlingist principles, which will allow us to build a new Britain on a prudent programme of "tax and borrow".

1. *To save the workers of Britain from Friday night lagerlout-ism, we have decided to increase the price of all alcoholic drinks with the exception of alcopops and strong cider.*

   This will eliminate the curse of teenage bingeism and pave the way to a European-style cafe culture of prudent all day-and-night drinking which will soon make Britain the drinks capital of the world – thus curbing the evils of alcohol abuse inherited from the lax practices which prevailed under the regime of the discredited and hated former leader Blair , the running dog of the cartel operated by the leisure, brewing and gambling complex.
2. *To save the planet, we will ask the supermarkets nicely to charge their customers a swingeing and prohibitive 5p for using a plastic bag. The elimination of this major source of worldwide pollution will be a triumph for Brownite-Dacreist thinking and will come into force in 2019.*
3. *To also save the planet we shall not be raising the tax on fuel until after the election (with a further exemption of five years for hybrid cars run on a mixture of cider and alcopops).*
4. *Talking of cars, we are proposing a tax of £30,000 a year on all family "gas-guzzlers" owned by parasitic members of the middle-classes seeking to flaunt their ill-gotten wealth in the face of all those honest working folk who are content to use the excellent public transport provided by the State, in conjunction with the respected capitalists operating under the enlightened principles of Bransonite-FirstGreatWesternist-Stagecoachism. It is intended that the £48 billion raised by these much-needed taxes will be used to eradicate child poverty, so that every honest British child will be able to afford an adequate supply of cider and alcopops at all hours of the day or night.*

And may I finally draw your attention to the important statement by Comrade Darling (below), which can be found as Appendix 409b to the 25th Schedule of the Guidance Notes to the 2008 Budgetary Plan.

Gordon Brown

Supreme Leader and author of *'The Little Green Book'*

A Personal Statement By Commissar Darling

I wish to put on record my heartfelt gratitude to our beloved Supreme Leader for giving me the honour to present his budgetary proposals to the Supreme Soviet. Most Chancellors blame their predecessors for the mess in which they find the nation's finances. I am in the very rare position of being able to thank my predecessor for the situation I have inherited. No further comment from me on this point is necessary or indeed permitted.

Signed, *Comrade A. Darling*

A Statement From Comrade Lord Goldsmith, Our Commissar For Britishness And Civic Solidarity

All British children will in future be required to swear an oath of loyalty to the symbols of national identity, as follows:

I, (name of child), do hereby solemnly pledge my allegiance to the Supreme Leader and promise to honour and obey our Great Helmsman as he guides our nation towards the radiant future of peace and prosperity brought about by the Age of Change. So help me, Gordon.

Children will be required to learn the words of this oath by heart (in whatever language they feel comfortable with, eg Gujarati, Serbo-Croat, Urdu, Estonian, Somali, Pistachio, Mugabe, Klingon, etc).

After the ceremony, the children may be served cider or alcopops to mark their initiation into the state of full citizenship.

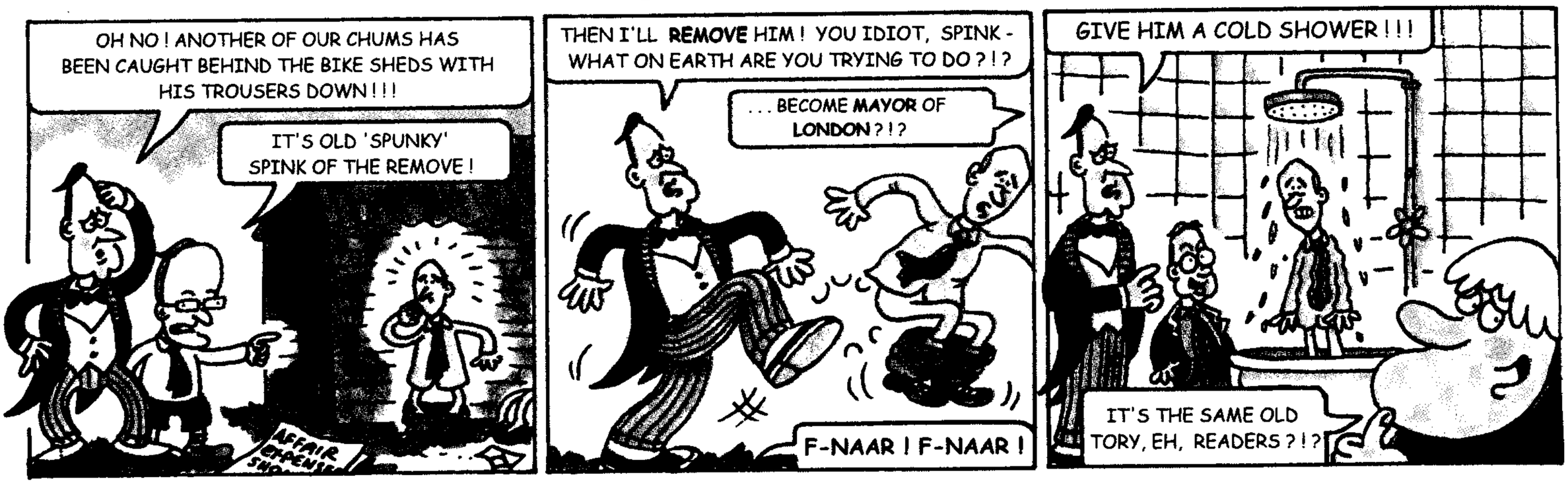
Signed, Comrade Lord Goldsmith, formerly Law Officer For The Legislation Of War Against Iraq

A Statement From Comrade Mrs Hodge, Commissar For Cultural Correctness

Comrades, We must be eternally vigilant in our tireless efforts to root out the evils of elitism in all its forms in our cultural activities, particularly the reactionary cancer of Beethovenist-Mozartism which infests such citadels of dilettantist-dead white maleist privilege as the so-called Promenade Concerts which were deliberately set up by the fascist Sir Henry Wood in order to appeal to the masses... er... instead of the sickening spectacle of people being brainwashed into pretending to enjoy such outmoded relics of feudal cultural exploitation, they should be eliminated from our national life and replaced by such genuinely British popular art forms as American gangstarap... and... er... it is totally sickening to my mind that...

Signed, Comrade Hodge,
formerly Minister for Ignoring Paedophilia In State Care Facilities

Dave Snooty AND HIS PALS


OH NO ! ANOTHER OF OUR CHUMS HAS BEEN CAUGHT BEHIND THE BIKE SHEDS WITH HIS TROUSERS DOWN ! ! !
IT'S OLD 'SPUNKY' SPINK OF THE REMOVE !
AFFAIR OF EXPENSE SHOP
THEN I'LL REMOVE HIM ! YOU IDIOT, SPINK - WHAT ON EARTH ARE YOU TRYING TO DO ? ! ?
. . . BECOME MAYOR OF LONDON ? ! ?
F-NAAR ! F-NAAR !
GIVE HIM A COLD SHOWER ! ! !
IT'S THE SAME OLD TORY, EH, READERS ? ! ?

THE BROON-ITES

The Blundering Bampots Bungling the Budget!

Fountain and Jamieson

WHIT WERE YE THINKIN' OF DARLING? DID YE NO' KEN WHIT WUID HAPPEN?
IT WASNAE ME, YE KEN VERY WELL IT'S GORDON THAT CALLS THA' SHOTS ON THA' BUDGET!
BROON ALE
HENRY DAVIES
HAUD YER WHEESHT, HILARY BROON. IT'S ALL PART OF MA CURRENT RELAUNCH AS THA' NEW BLAIR...
THA' ONLY WAY TAE MAK' ME SEEM THE SMILIEST BONNIEST MAN IN THE COUNTRY...
DRAMATIC ENTRANCE
IS TAE MAK' EVERYONE IN THA' COUNTRY MORE MISERABLE THAN ME!
JINGS...
CRIVVENS...
AND HELP MA BANK ACCOUNT!
SYPHON
DAILY JOCK BUDGET SHINES LIKE A RAY O' SHITE
JOCKSHIRE POST SCUNNER DARLING TAKES ALL OOR BAWBIES
JOCK NEWS
JOCKO TIMES 8 PENCE ON BONES
NEWS OF THE JOCKS BUDGET IS BOLL

MOST THE CLINTSTONES - THE PREHISTORIC FIRST FAMILY

You're a first-timer!
You're an old-timer!
...and I'm a two-timer!
Let's call a truce. How would you like to be Vice President?
Vice? No way! That's Bill's job!
It would be the blonde leading the bland!
OK, it's WAR again then!
YABADABA DONTGETCAUGHT CALLINGHIMBLACK!!!

Celeb

LIGGER

SIMON COWELL WAS OFFERED £1 MILLION LAST YEAR TO DO AN AD CAMPAIGN FOR VIAGRA.
I KNOW.
HE FOUND THE OFFER INSULTING, APPARENTLY...
THAT'S TOTALLY UNDERSTANDABLE, BARRY. JUST THINK ABOUT IT FROM SIMON'S PERSPECTIVE...
HIS AGENT RINGS UP OUT OF THE BLUE AND SAYS: "THEY WANT YOU TO ADVERTISE VIAGRA. THE OFFER IS FOR ONE MILLION POUNDS..."
"BUT LET'S SEE IF WE CAN GET IT UP, SHALL WE?"
SPLUTTER

BLAIR TO BE GIVEN GOD JOB

by Our Man in the Clouds **St Peter O'Borne**

THE FORMER Prime Minister, Mr Tony Blair, is being tipped to take over the top job as Supreme Being, it was revealed today.

Sources close to Mr Blair said, "It is a natural progression. He is already in charge of bringing peace in the Middle East, solving global warming, ending world poverty and restoring confidence in international banking

"I, er... I mean Tony, would make an ideal God – perhaps I, I mean he, could do it on a one day a week basis between making speeches and opening supermarkets."

The leader of the opposition, Lord Satan of the Underworld, welcomed the potential appointment: "Tony Blair has already done a great job bringing war, death, famine and plague wherever he goes.

"It would be a breath of fresh air to have someone like him to work with rather than an old fashioned man with a long beard and a confrontational attitude to solving problems."

'MY PARTY RUINED' Says Teenager

by Our Political Staff **Al Capop**

A TEENAGER's celebratory party ended in a nightmare when thousands of people failed to turn up after he put out an appeal on the BBC.

A tearful Nick Clegg, 18, said, "It was going to be the party of a lifetime. It was going to be my big day. And then the BBC ruined it by telling everyone about it in advance.

"No one came except my friend Lembit Opik who had to drink all the booze himself."

Today the scene of the party looks as though a bomb hasn't hit it. Pamphlets are stacked in neat order. Free badges saying *"Give Us A Clegg-Up"* lie undisturbed in their boxes. Hundreds of raffle tickets (first prize: "Night Out With Charles Kennedy") remain unsold.

It's All Gone Jenny Tong

Clegg's mother, a heartbroken Mrs Ludmilla Clegg, said, "Nick had been looking forward to this so much. And then this happens. It is heart breaking."

● Full story & pix **p. 94**

Advertisement

EASTER EYE APPEAL

This man is starving to death. Can you just look away?

6 months ago he was a healthy 18 stone. Now he weighs barely 14 stone and lives only on a diet of eggs.

● £300 will buy him a decent lunch for one at the Ivy

● £1,000 will buy him an agreeable bottle of wine

● £10 million will buy him a Damien Hirst dead shark which will feed him for two years.

Send your donation at once to: Charles Shaaki Appeal, c/o Nigella Eggspress, Duneaton Square, London EG G1

Nursery Times

Friday, March 21, 2008

OLD WOMAN IN SHOE TO BLAME

by **Unfit Mother Goose**

A SINGLE mother living in a shoe with a large number of children sired by different fathers was accused last night of "gross neglect".

The mother, an old woman of 32, lives an alternative lifestyle in a shoe and claims "that she has so many children, she doesn't know what to do."

But social workers are claiming that the children were fed a meagre diet of "broth" and were then "whipped and sent to bed".

Said a spokesperson, "The children should obviously have been taken into care."

A committee of enquiry has been set up under Mrs Margaret Hodge and the shoe is to be demolished by Health and Safety officials.

On Other Pages

● Grand Young Duke of York in war gaffe: "We shouldn't have joined the Americans marching up the hill" **3** ● Four and twenty blackbirds "came out of tin", admits Old Mother Delia **4** ● Little Red Riding Ken confesses to drink problem – "My, what a large whisky you've got!" says Granny **94**

POLICE LOG

Neasden Central Police Station

Office hours: 9-12 Mon-Tues (except Tuesday)

0900 hrs All officers despatched to BBC to investigate serious allegation of Racial Hate Crime. A Mr Basil Brush, a celebrity fox of no fixed hole, was accused of offensive Romanyist language towards members of the Travelling community, claiming that gypsies tried to sell clothes pegs and lucky heather to the gullible and unsuspecting public. When questioned under caution, Mr Brush refused to justify his remarks and answered all questions with the unhelpful comment "Boom! Boom!" He was therefore immediately taken into custody under the Prevention of Terrorism Act and charged with Incitement to Bomb. He was, however, later given an unconditional discharge when his lawyer pointed out that foxes were a protected species under the Abolition of Hunting Act 2005.

1600 hrs Officers retire for three-hour stress management session at The Fox & Gypsy, Asda Road, Neasden.

Killer Storms Lash Britain

Clockwise Lane on M25 Closed For Five Minutes

That Radio Four Today programme in full

Jim Naughtie *(for it is he)*: And now for the weather with Patti O'Heater. Good morning, Patti, it looks pretty grim out there, doesn't it?

O'Heater *(for it is she)*: Yes, Jim, the Met Office has already put the whole country on red alert for the extreme weather conditions that Britain is facing today, and already some places are experiencing freak winds of up to 200mph.

Naughtie: So what you're forecasting today is gales of unprecedented force, whipping up giant waves engulfing whole communities with a possible massive loss of life. Is that right, Patti?

O'Heater: Let me put it like this – if you're thinking of going out of the house today, you should only do so wearing a lifejacket.

Naughtie: Thanks for the warning, Patti. And for the latest update on the killer storms we're going over live to Ranjit Wapshott in the little Dorset fishing village of Barkworth-on-Sea. Can you hear me over the hurricane-force winds, Ranjit?

Wapshott *(for it is he)*: No problem, Jim. So far it's pretty quiet here, but we're hearing reports on the radio that we can soon expect winds of 200mph, creating a huge tsunami which could well engulf this picturesque Dorset fishing village, leading to a certain amount of structural damage.

Naughtie: So you're saying that there's already a major disaster in the making down there in Dorset, and that we could soon be looking at a death toll running into the hundreds, if not thousands?

Wapshott: Well, we can't entirely rule that out, Jim, although right now it's a lovely sunny day down here in Dorset, with a very pleasant slight breeze.

(We hear noise of seagulls and toddlers playing on beach)

Naughtie: Pretty serious stuff, Ranjit. And what's the feeling amongst all the ordinary people of Barkworth who are in imminent danger of losing their lives?

Wapshott: Yes, Jim, earlier I spoke to a local pensioner, Mrs Mildred Prunehat.

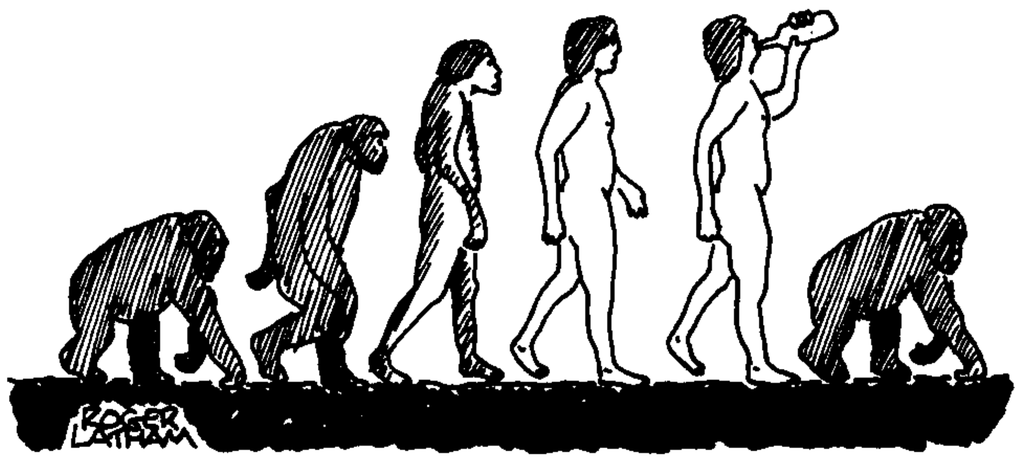
Mrs Prunehat *(for it is she)*: I have been having a lot of trouble with my arthritis. The doctor gave me some tablets. They don't make much difference but, on a nice day like today, it can't help but make you feel better.

Naughtie: So there you have it. The terrified face of Britain as the worst storms for 300 years sweep in...

And now – Thought For The Day with the Rev Christopher Dawkins of the Church of the Seventh Day Atheists...

Dawkins: Hullo Jim, hullo Sarah. You know, when I heard the news of these terrible killer storms killing millions of innocent people, I thought that, if God existed, he must be a very unpleasant person. But fortunately he doesn't. So everything's alright, isn't it? And may I wish you all a happy non-Easter.

Naughtie: Thank you, Chris. And now back to Patti O'Heater at the Met Office, for the latest update on these killer storms which are *(cont. 94 kHz)*



"You won't get Geoffrey going into Peterborough without wearing military uniform"

THE NEW DWORKIN BEE

Friday 21 March, 2008

'I AM DESCENDED FROM SLAVES' – Borick Obarmy's Proud Boast

by Our Man At The London Primaries **Dr Livingstone I. Presume**

BORICK OBARMY, the charismatic, front-running candidate in the battle for the most powerful office in the world, the London mayoralty, today told his cheering supporters (Sid and Doris Cameron) that he had recently traced his ancestry to humble slaves.

"So much," he said, "for people who claim that I am some kind of a stuck-up toff.

"I have now discovered, just in time for the election, that in fact my great-grandmother Mrs Ludmilla Obarmy, was a Greek slave sold by Ottoman traders to a wealthy Turkish merchant, Suleiman the Rush-die, and transported to America in the cramped cargo hold of a bendy bus."

There were emotional scenes with Obarmy weeping openly into his top hat, as he sang "Set my people free" backed by the gospel choir of the Turkish Orthodox Tabernacle Choir.

Obarmy'sheadline-making discovery of his slave roots was hailed as a major breakthrough in the election campaign by daytime TV celebrity Matthew D'Ancona, who said "Borick feels our pain. He will lead us to the Promised Land."

Late News

BORICK'S PHEASANT PLEDGE

Borick Obarmy today promised to replace the hated pigeons in Trafalgar Square with pheasants which could then be shot by his friends. "Who says I haven't got any sensible policies?" said the odds-on favourite in the election which has the whole of Britain talking.

ST CAKES DEFENDS CHARITABLE STATUS

by Our Education Staff **Huge Grant**

Mr R.J.G. Kipling, headmaster of the prestigious, £150,000-a-term, West Midlands independent school St Cakes (motto: *'Quis paget entrat'*), today lashed out at government plans to remove charitable status from Britain's public schools.

"St Cakes," he pointed out, "has a long tradition of helping the wider community by making its facilities available to all.

"For instance," he said, "our squash courts are open to the public during the school holidays, for a token fee of only £100 an hour.

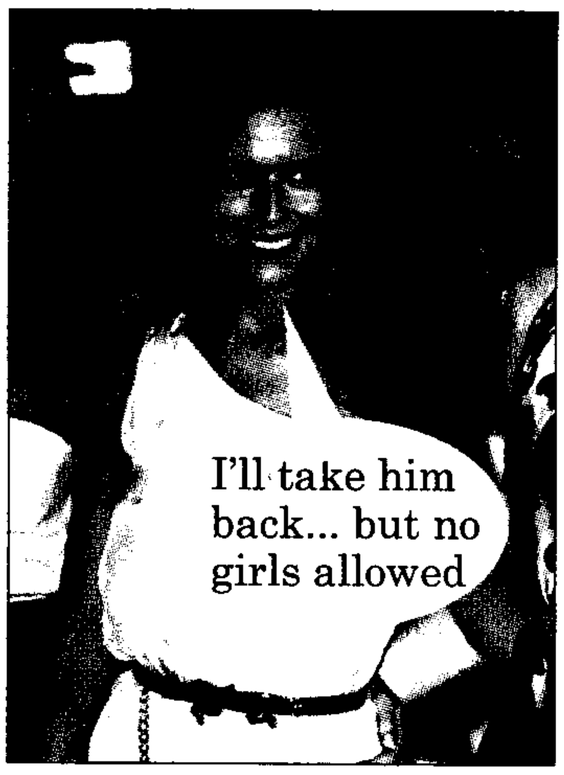
"Similarly," he went on, "local businesses can hire the school chapel for conferences, now that it has bluetooth and wi-fi facilities.

"Our Olympic-size outdoor swimming pool," he continued, "is open to anyone who wishes to use it in the months between December and February.

"And, furthermore," he explained, "we offer scholarships to deprived Russian children who have the misfortune to be born into oligarch families, and we allow them to attend St Cakes at a preferential rate of only £300,000 a term.

"Surely this is proof enough," Mr Kipling concluded, "that we are a bona fide charity, set up only to help the less privileged members of the community, such as myself and Mrs Kipling."

BLONDE FOOTBALLER'S WIFE FORGIVES VERY RICH FOOTBALLER WHO SLEPT WITH BLONDE TART



On Other Pages

● Bear forgiven for defecating in wood

● Pope forgiven for being Catholic

IN TODAY'S EYE

Deedes Romance With The Youthful Queen Victoria

(taken from the new sensational biography ***Dirty Deedes*** by Robinson Jammy)

IN HIS old age, I can reveal, the legendary Fleet Street reporter William Deedes fell hopelessly in love with the young Queen Victoria.

The unlikely couple met at Royal Ascot in 1840, when the already elderly Deedes was covering the race meeting as a reporter for the now-defunct Morning Post.

"He was a sweet old gentleman," recorded the smitten Victoria in her diary that evening, "and he gave me a tip for a horse that came last."

The couple several times travelled together overseas, including an incognito visit to the front-line of the Crimean War, which Deedes was covering for the now-defunct Daily Telegraph.

The young Victoria was captivated by Deedes's stories of how he had met William the Conqueror and played bowls with Sir Francis Drake

(whom he likes to recall 'wore odd-coloured socksh').

The Prince Consort, however, took a dim view of the liaison, and on Victoria's marriage gave orders that the relationship should cease.

Deedes was heartbroken and threw himself with redoubled vigour into his work. He only outlived his former beloved by a mere 106 years.

● *In tomorrow's Daily Kissandtelegraph* **'Posh and Deedesh: How Bill Seduced Victoria Beckham'.**

Let's Parlez Franglais!
avec Kilometres Kington (en retard)

Numero 94
Le State Visit à Grande Bretagne de President et Madame Sarkozy

La Reine: Bienvenue à l'Angleterre. Êtes-vous come far?

Sarko: Oui, naturellement! Je suis President de France et voilà ma femme, le très sexy Carla Tutti-Frutti!

Le Duc d'Edinburgh: Phew! Quelle scorcheure! Un peu d'alright, n'est-ce pas! Vous voulez voir mes etchings, Madame?

Madame Sarko: Ooh-la-la! Vous êtes un one!

La Reine: Et qu'est-ce que *vous* do, Madame Sarko!

Madame Sarko: Je *do* Monsieur Sarko! Et previeusement une grande ligne des hommes, including votre own Monsieur Jagger!

La Reine: Nous ne sommes pas amusé!

New Recipe – Exclusive to the Eye!

DELIA'S 'HOW TO CHEAT AT COOKING'

IT'S SO easy to knock up something that looks appetising, but is in fact just a rehash of old ingredients! Here's how:

1. Take one old book called 'How To Cheat At Cooking' by Delia Smith (published 1971).

2. Using just a pair of scissors, fillet it carefully into nice, new, bite-size chapters.

3. Now add paste. Be careful, it could get a bit sticky.

4. Pop it in the publishers.

5. When it's half-baked, bring it out quickly and serve immediately.

6. Mmmm! The public feel really cheated!

What you'll need

● 3 pounds-worth of old book ● 1 pair scissors
● 1 pot paste ● A lot of nerve
● Even more sherry

© How to cheat at publishing 2008

Mary Ann Bighead on the platonic friendship between a brilliant writer and the late **Bill Deedes**

Bill Deedes was the most extraordinary journalist of the 20th century because he was the only one who didn't try and jump on me within seconds of our meeting!

In fact, every single male adult in British public life fancies me rotten. True! They can't help it. The Mary Ann Bighead allure drives them wild: Cabinet Ministers, Peers, Editors, Admirals of the Fleet, Archbishops of Canterbury... all go weak at the knees as soon as I appear.

But with Bill it was different. Of course he was secretly gagging for it, but being a true gentleman, he studiously and politely covered it up by refusing to flirt with me even though it was quite clear he was dying to get me into the sack – like everyone else, including the President of the United States, Professor Stephen Hawking and, on one memorable journalistic trip to EuroDisney with my daughters Brainella and Intelligencia, all *seven* of Snow White's dwarves!

So it is quite clear that Bill Deedes could never have had an affair with anyone, as this new, so-called biography claims. If he didn't try it on with me, he would obviously never have been tempted by any other woman.

Posterity may record that Bill Deedes was best known for his journalistic exploits, or for his famous appearance as "Boot" in Evelyn Waugh's *Scoop* or as the golfing partner of Denis Thatcher and recipient of the notorious "Dear Bill" letters in *Private Eye*.

But I know better, as usual.

The most remarkable achievement of the 94-year-old journalistic icon was his ability to keep his trousers on when Mary Ann Bighead was in the room!

PS. So much for those who say all I do is write about how clever I am. In this column I have just written about how sexually irresistible I happen to be. Pretty modest, eh? And clever with it.

© Mary Ann Bighead 2008.

MERCENARY EXCUSES HIS PART IN 'BOTCHED COUP'

by Our Foreign Staff **Koo D'Etat**

"IT SEEMED like a good idea at the time, to depose a hated and bloodthirsty dictator and take over his oil," said the discredited mercenary Tony Blair in an exclusive interview yesterday.

Tony "Mad Poodle" Blair was recruited by a bizarre group of American lunatics, several of whom he named in a wide-ranging interview for which he was paid £500,000.

It All Went Blair-Shaped

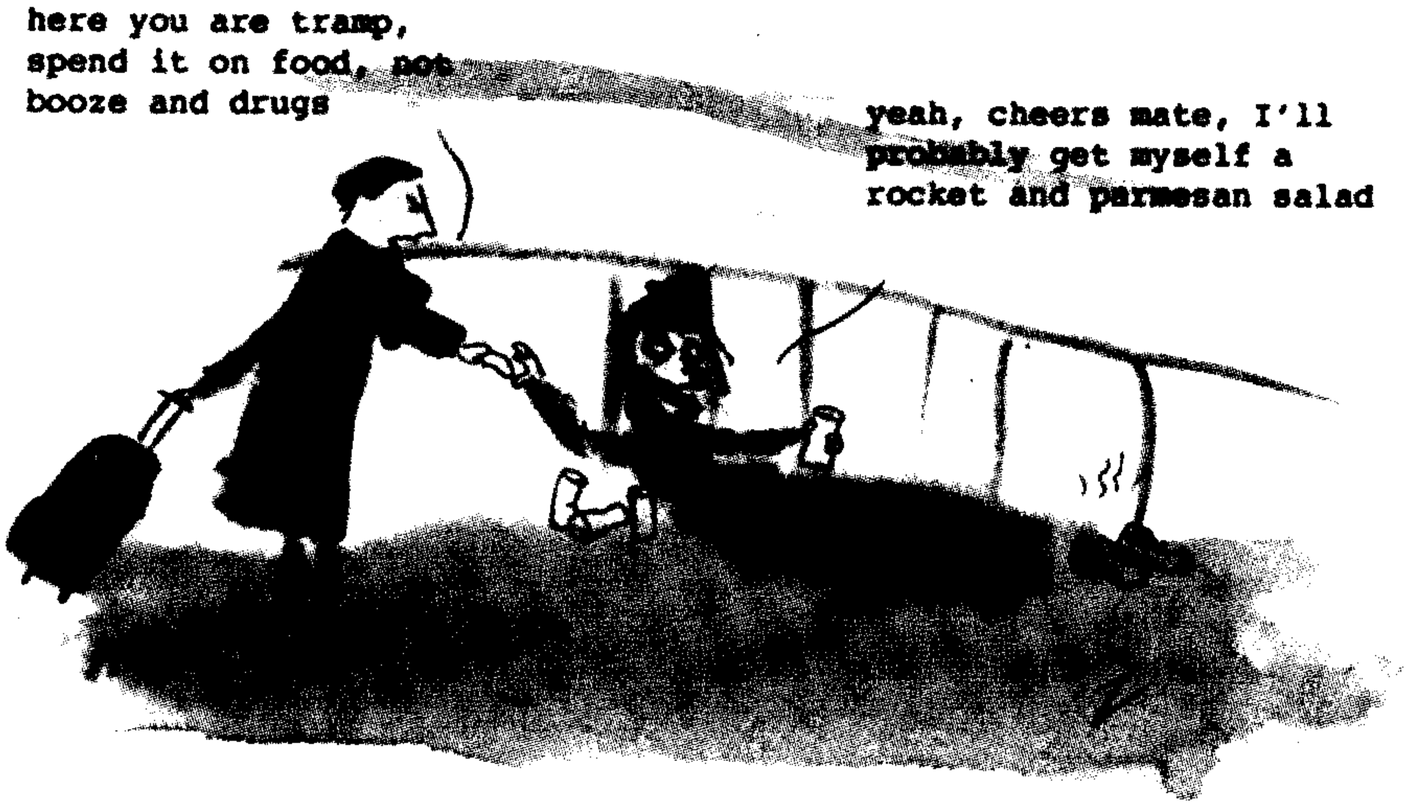
Not speaking from the prison cell that he should be in, Blair blamed shadowy figures such as "George Dubya", a Texan alcoholic, "Donny" Rumsfeld, a born-again madman, and "Wolfie" Wolfowitz for the failed plan to invade the oil-rich country and depose its leader.

Said Blair, "The idea was beautifully simple, and we called it 'Operation Shock and Awe'. The first bit was easy. We flew in half a million troops and took over the country in a few days.

"The next bit was the part we hadn't planned, which was what to do next. That's when it all fell apart.

"I was left to take the blame, and everyone thinks it was my fault – but it wasn't."

Today, the ex-public school mercenary faces an uncertain future, not knowing who is going to give him a $2-billion-a-year job next.


here you are tramp, spend it on food, not booze and drugs
yeah, cheers mate, I'll probably get myself a rocket and parmesan salad

From The Message Boards

Members of the online community respond to the major issues of the day...

Environment Secretary Defiant

Just listened to Hilary Benn repeatedly refusing to apologise for failings at the Pirbright research centre that caused last year's foot-and-mouth outbreak. Another minister falls victim to the epidemic that is sweeping through Her Majesty's Government: foot-IN-mouth! 😉 – ***Robin***

Heurd it 2! lol! Wat happen to her voice it sound's wierd like a batty man! Hillery u iz a a looser u aint neva gona beet Borat in da priymery's now! – ***Dwayne***

Lord Goldsmith Proposes Compulsory Oath-Swearing

Kid's running wild, stab-bings and shooting's. Our brave armed force's abused in the street. No respect for no won. New Labours answer? Young people ordered to SWEAR AT THE QUEEN! Welcome to crowd cuckoo land "United King-dumb" 😮 – ***British_Barry***

Spot on mate, as u say, abuse the queen who ca'nt awnser her own back. Then Alister Darling talks for three hour's on ciggerrete taxes and VAT and no mention of surreal killer's gang's ect. Every day another kill-ing another ab-ductian, and media SILENCE. Turn a blind eye, do'nt upset they're New Labour "Darling's" lol! Its the last world in mad-ness. – ***Chelsea_70***

Capello Leaves Door Open For Beckham

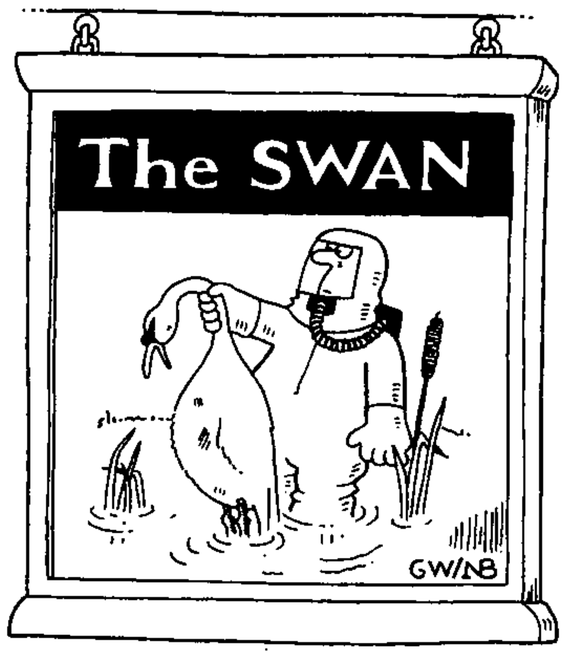
Agree with Boing_Boing_Baggies_68, good to hear Fabio say Beckham may still win his hundredth cap. As a loyal servant of his country it's the least he deserves, and he'd be absolutely guttered to be stranded on 99. But is it the best thing for him? I've been studying the records of previous centurions, and they all went on to win far fewer caps after the 100th than before it. The lesson for Becks seems to be: if you want to play on for years, then stop playing now – ***Colin***

Brown Says Forces Should Wear Uniforms In Public

Take all mugger's, rapist's, peado's and junkie scum put them in the RAF, navvy and army and send them off to dye. Then put all our soldier's sailer's and air-men in prison for a well erned HOLIDAY with color TV in they're room and all mod con's. lol! Can I be home secretary now please? ☺ – ***Felixstowe_boy***

Spot on Felix toe boy. Heir to the thrown sent too Afghanistan to die. Aussie peado deported back "here" ie hero's serve-ing and scums arivingS Do the math!! – ***England_till_i_die***

MODERN INN SIGNS



POETRY CORNER

In Memoriam Baroness Thatcher, former Prime Minister 1979-1990

So. Farewell
Then Mrs
Thatcher – Britain's
Greatest prime
Minister since
Churchill.

You were known as
The Iron Lady.

"The Lady's not for
Turning." Yes, that
Was your
Catchphrase.

But alas...

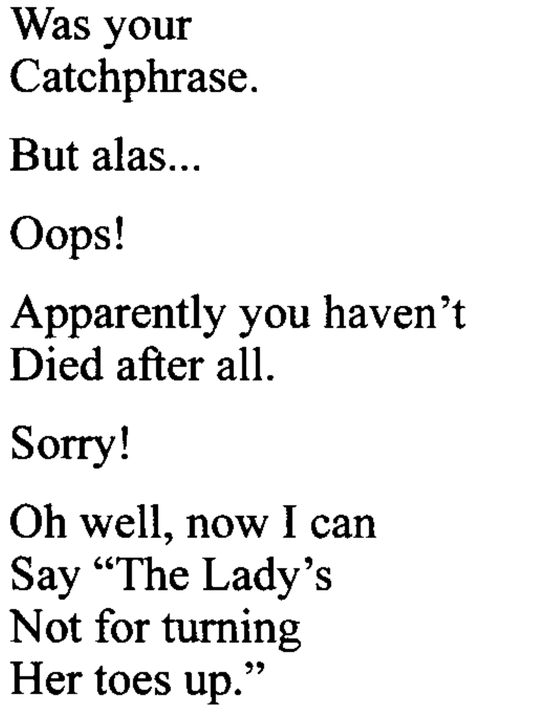
Oops!

Apparently you haven't
Died after all.

Sorry!

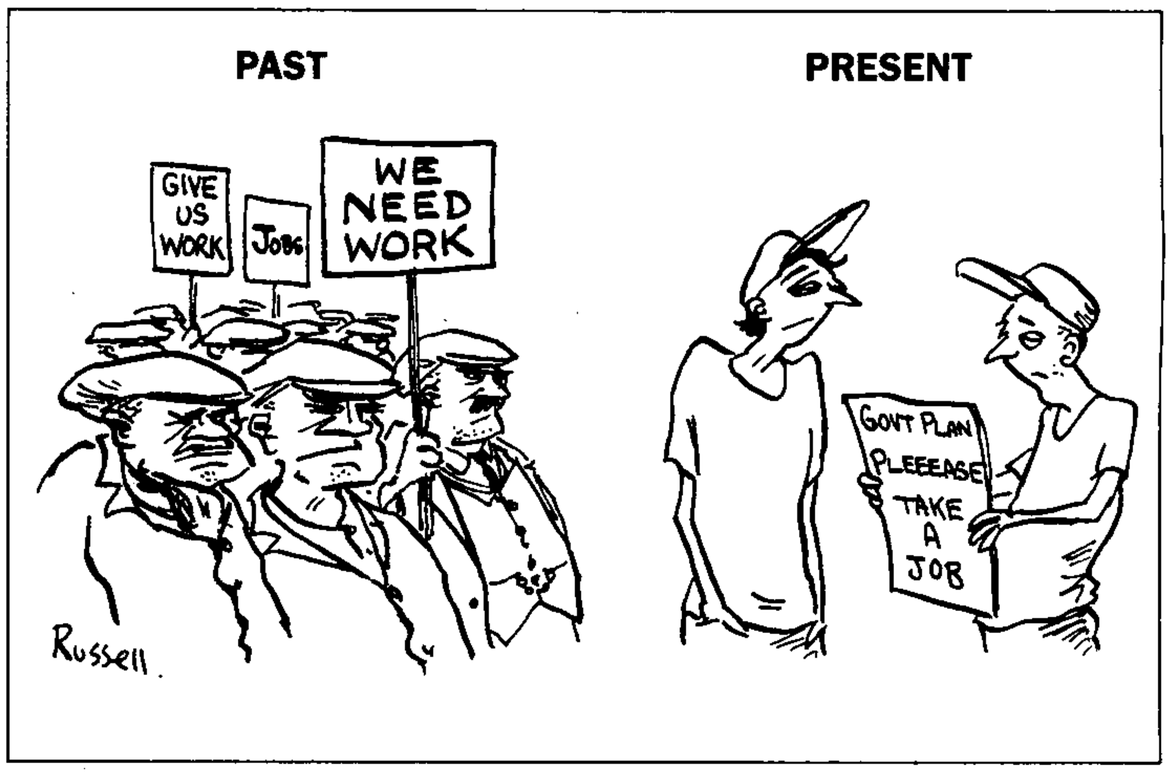
Oh well, now I can
Say "The Lady's
Not for turning
Her toes up."

E.J. Thribb (17½ pages in the *Telegraph*)



Budget At A Glance

- ☹ Boredom up 10%
- ☹ Tedium up 15%
- ☹ 20% on Dullness
- ☹ Higher Rate of Yawning
- ☹ Lower threshold for Snoozing
- ☹ Interest down to 0%



'BINGE TAXING' AT EPIDEMIC LEVELS

by Our Economics Staff **Phil Coffers**

THERE have been increased calls for the government to act today after millions of innocent drinkers were clobbered in the latest sickening 'binge taxing' episode.

"One minute these drinkers were enjoying a quiet pint in their local on the way home from work, the next minute they were being hammered mercilessly by an out-of-control Chancellor," said one observer. "And it is not just the drinkers, it's the drivers and the homeowners as well," he continued. "The Chancellor just can't stop taxing. He is at it twenty-four hours a day *(cont. p. 94)*

Carriers Harmful To Environment

A NEW study has revealed that battered red boxes have an even more devastating effect on the country than plastic bags.

"The quicker these red boxes are consigned to history the better," said all drinkers/drivers/homeowners *(cont. p. 94)*

"Enjoy yourselves, but remember... drink responsibly"

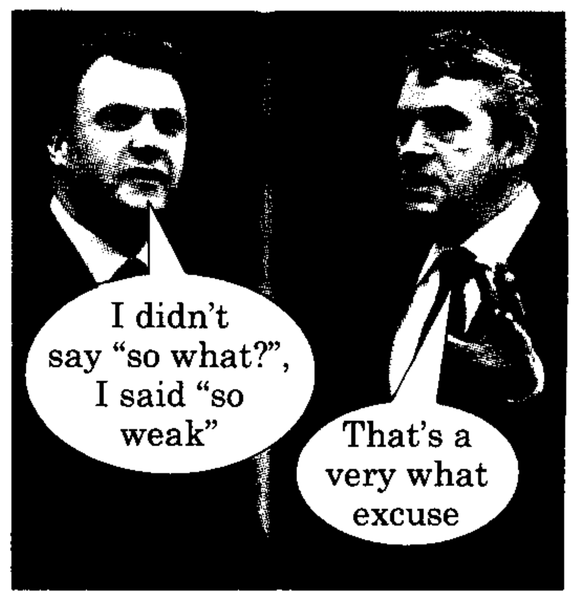
Letters *to the Editor*

The American Politician and the Prostitute

SIR – I am sure many of your readers will have been as shocked as I was to read that the Governor of New York, Mr T. S. Eliot-Spritzen, was being charged over £10,000 for the services of a lady of the night. In my day, one could purchase the favours of a very presentable *poule de luxe* on Park Lane for no more than five shillings (and 10/- for the room) – in today's currency, say 75p. If proof were needed of the ravages of inflation, this is surely it. I lay the blame fairly and squarely on the failure of the now notorious sub-prime market, which had such deleterious repercussions for world finance and lonely gentlemen availing themselves of the good offices of the ancient and honourable profession of courtesans.

Sir Herbert Gusset (Client 6)
The Old Knocking Shop,
Hooker-on-the-Game, Beds.

BALLS IN COMMONS HECKLE DRAMA



News In Brief

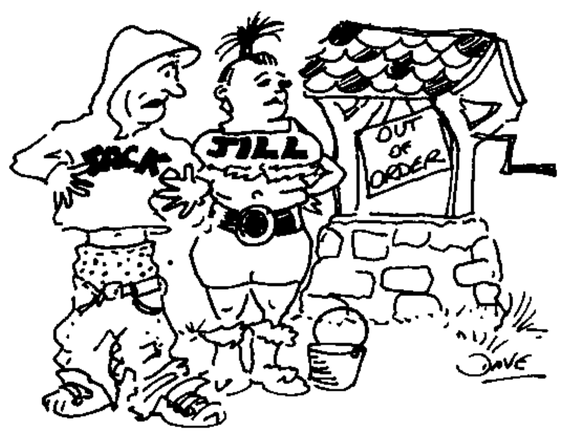
SOLDIER RETURNS TO GIRLFRIEND

AN ARMY officer who had been serving abroad has returned to his girlfriend in the UK.

A source close to the couple said, "Oh-my-god, right, my best chum Clarissa who's, like, really, really best friends with them both said she was in the club when he walked in. Apparently, right, after he'd ordered champagne for everybody the both of them were, like, so totally snogging one another, and *(cont. p. 94)*

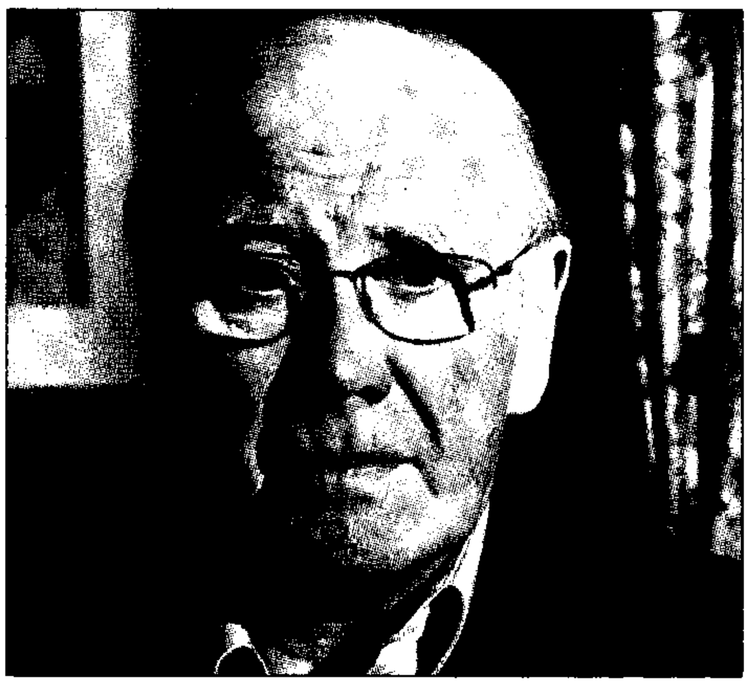
TEENAGERS NOT INVOLVED IN GRUESOME MURDER

STUNNING news emerged last night when it was revealed *(That's enough news, Ed)*



"That's well out of order"

DIARY



SIR MENZIES CAMPBELL

I was born at 3.15 am on 22 May 1941. I here pay tribute to the nurses, midwives and doctors who, with a combination of dedication, perseverance and expertise, brought me into the world. They truly deserve our thanks.

At that early stage, they would not have realised that the baby they had just delivered would emerge as (friends assure me) a formidable politician and, furthermore, a future former leader of his party.

My birth proved as popular as I had hoped it would be. There was a roar of approval in the ward, and both staff and patients were visibly moved. The feeling in the hospital and beyond was universally favourable. At my parents' home, the telephone rang incessantly. Friends and relatives wished to express their satisfaction at my successful arrival.

At that stage, I was still unware that my future colleague and leader, Charles Kennedy, would struggle with a major drink problem. He was not yet born. But had I known, I would not have gone on about it. I am a trusty figure, and Charles's lifelong battle with alcohol* is, I believe, a wholly private matter, and not one that should be broadcast to all and sundry at every opportunity. But more of that anon.

At school, I proved a notable sportsman. At 2.51 on July 1st 1948, I won the under-8 egg-and-spoon race. The crowd roared its approval. It was an immense achievement and one that afforded me tremendous satisfaction. My victory speech was as successful as I hoped it would be. "This is not just a victory for myself," I began, "No – it is a victory for all those who, with courage and foresight, took up not only their egg, but also their spoon, put one leg in front of the other, and ran!" I did not mention Charles Kennedy or his serious drink problem**, of which more later. That is not the sort of person I am.

Following my victory, my mother wrote to my grandmother, "Ming did magnificently." My grandmother wrote back, "Yes, he certainly did." The headline in the school magazine was also favourable. "M. Campbell wins egg-and-spoon," it said. Little did that headline-writer know that the young lad who won that race would one day become not only an Olympic athlete but also the former leader of his party and, furthermore, a knight of the realm!

At Glasgow University, I fell effortlessly into a group of outstanding young men drawn together by the camaraderie of the Union, coffee room discussions and the excitement of political debate.

I rose to make my maiden speech at the University Union at 8.21 pm on May 9th 1960. It was greeted, friends tell me, most warmly. First, I paid generous tribute to the previous speaker. "First of all, Mr Chairman," I said, "Let me pay tribute to the previous speaker. Their contribution to this debate has been, I can assure him or her, most pertinent." By now, the mood in the hall was electric. "May I continue," I continued, "by wishing all the best not only to those who support my own side in this debate, but also to those who, for reasons of conviction or conscience, have decided to support the other side.

"Furthemore, Mr Chairman," I continued to continue, "let me assure you that..."

By now I had the audience in the palm of my hand. When I sat down fifty seven and a half minutes later, I had stunned the remaining audience with my oratory: their silence was tangible. The Minutes of the Debate tell their own story. "Menzies Campbell made the next speech," they observe. "In which he displayed a mastery of detail." Praise, indeed.

At that point, I felt it would be premature to mention Charles Kennedy and his severe drink problem***, as he had not yet been born. But in the years to come, the risk presented to the party by his struggle with alcohol would prove enormous.

My first big political test came when Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait at 3.14pm on 2 August 1990. As the Defence Spokesman for the Liberal Democrats, I considered that timing was all. So when I rose to speak at our annual conference in Harrogate seven and a half weeks later, Saddam must have known that he could expect little mercy from this particular quarter.

I roundly condemned his selfish action, telling delegates that, by invading Kuwait, Saddam had proved that he was no friend of the Liberal Democrats. I was forthright in my attack, sending out a resounding message to Saddam. "I would therefore urge him to take the responsible and courteous course and withdraw his troops at his, and their, earliest convenience," I concluded.

The hall burst out in applause. I received roars of approval. Paddy rushed over to me and pumped my hand. In Volume One of his diaries, he writes, "Ming made a good speech." Roy also heaped praise on me. The ovation lasted a full 95 seconds, including interval. The *Harrogate Observer* reported the following morning, "Some delegates were saying this speech stamped Ming Campbell as potential deputy leadership material."

I made no mention in my speech of Charles Kennedy and his battle with alcohol****. That is not my style. I felt that it would be hugely disloyal, as at that stage he was not drinking, nor was he our leader. But it was a stormcloud that, some ten years later, was to hang over the party I loved like an earthquake.

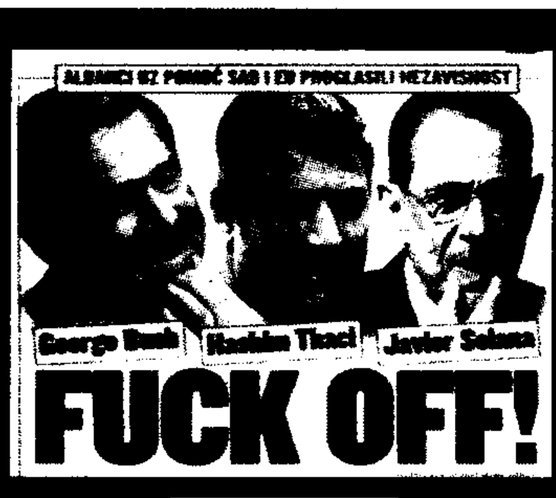
As Party Leader, I received regular hand-written congratulations from Tony Blair on the manner in which I conducted myself in Parliament.

"Dear Ming," he wrote, addressing me by my Christian name, "It was very thoughtful of you to write and ask me how I thought you did with your questions yesterday," he wrote on October 23rd 2006. "I am pleased to confirm that I thought you did really quite well under tricky circumstances. I sincerely hope you will carry on being leader of the LibDems for a long time yet."

To have confirmation of my leadership abilities from such a formidable world statesman was hugely gratifying. Jack Straw was later to acknowledge the extent of my talents by offering me the Governorship of Gibraltar. That some members of my own party chose not to recognise these proven abilities is entirely a matter for them and their consciences. Would they really have preferred to be led by a man known to the rest of the world as a relaxed and friendly extrovert but whom his loyal colleagues knew as a secret alcoholic hell-bent on a spiral of self-destruction? That is not a question I intend to answer quite yet.

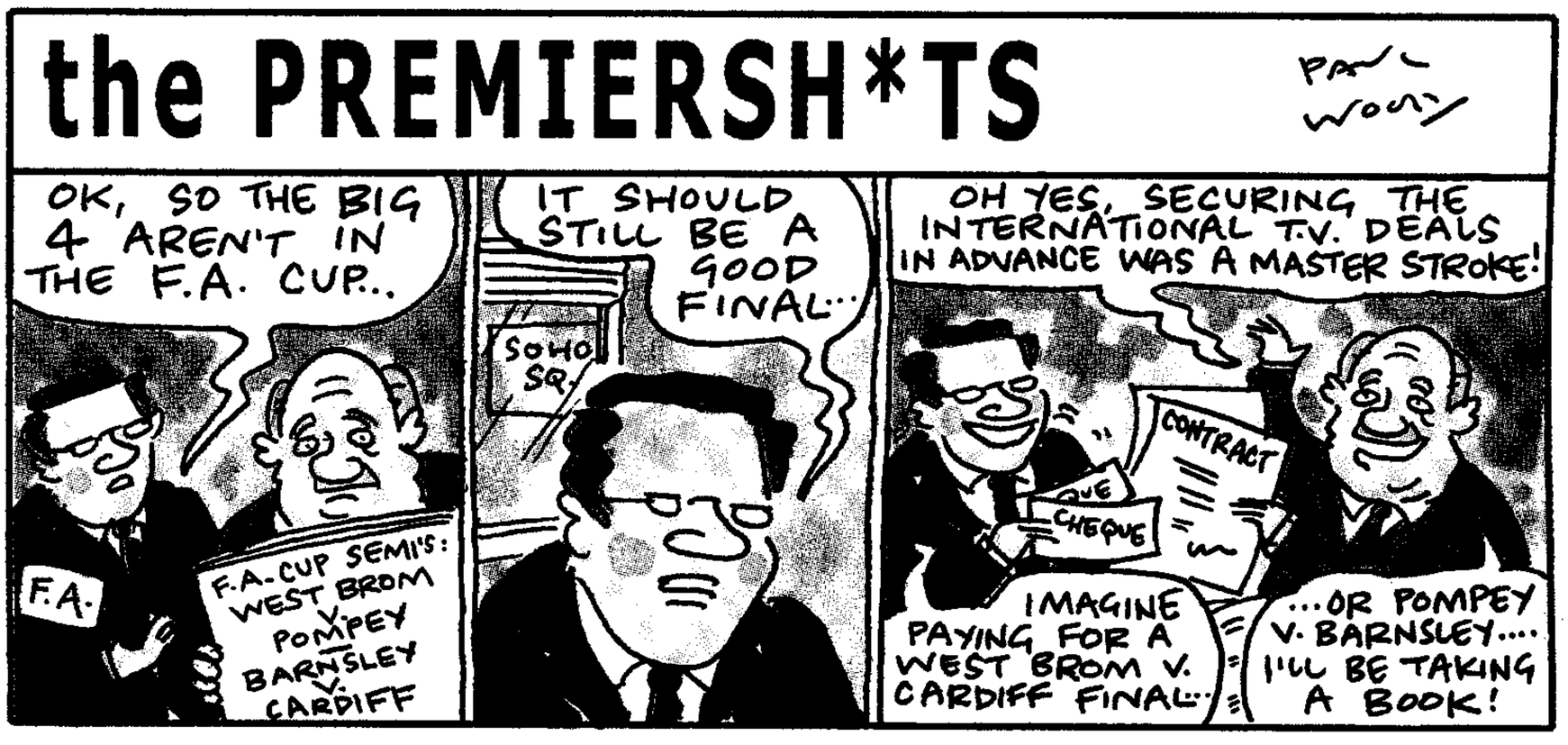
* *See pages 99-125*
** *See pages 125-172*
*** *See pages 172-205*
**** *See pages 205-295*
***** *See pages 295-End*

As told to
CRAIG BROWN



Press (Belgrade)

Safe and warm.
Make sure you and your family are safe and warm from carbon monoxide poisoning.
Brtitish Gas


the PREMIERSH*TS
PAUL WOOLEY
OK, SO THE BIG 4 AREN'T IN THE F.A. CUP..
F.A.
F.A.-CUP SEMI'S: WEST BROM V. POMPEY BARNSLEY V. CARDIFF
IT SHOULD STILL BE A GOOD FINAL...
SOHO SQ.
OH YES, SECURING THE INTERNATIONAL T.V. DEALS IN ADVANCE WAS A MASTER STROKE!
CONTRACT
CHEQUE
IMAGINE PAYING FOR A WEST BROM V. CARDIFF FINAL...
...OR POMPEY V. BARNSLEY.... I'LL BE TAKING A BOOK!

Literary Review

China syndrome

My Favourite Wife

Tony Parsons

(HarperCollins, £17.99)

AS THE plane came in to land, Bill Holden and his wife Becca looked fondly at their li'l daughter, Holly. Say Hi to Shanghai.

A new life.

A different world.

Lots to write about, too, now that he'd done the research, thought Tony.

Bill's a commercial lawyer. His wife Becca's a bit posher than he is, and Bill, whose dad was a brickie, has had to struggle to get where he is. But now he's got his big break. A posting to the firm's office in Shanghai.

Joining the gold rush in the fastest growing economy on the planet.

And now here they are, Bill and Becca and cute little Holly, installed in a luxury apartment in a block called Paradise Mansions in Gubei New Area. It's a million miles from their old Victorian semi. Across the river the glittering skyline of Shanghai beckons. But as they gaze out of the window, they wonder: who are all those glamorous looking young ladies down there, loitering about in the courtyard, waiting to be picked up by dodgy looking men in smart new cars?

I've researched this. They're called "jinseniao", which means canaries, and the apartment block is called a "nialong", which means birdcage. Geddit?

Later, in the girlie bar called Suzy Too where his new office chums drag him after late night contract drafting sessions, Bill sees one of the same women. It can't be, can it? Yes, folks, it's Bill to the rescue, knight in shining armour, Don Q to her Dulcinea. Only it turns out she's just being practical.

Not selling her soul.

Or even her body.

Just being practical.

Well, believe that if you like. And Bill, after one too many Tsingtao beers, certainly does. He's desperate to get to know "the real China". His colleagues are more down to earth. They explain to him about what they call the "Kai Tak Rules" (named, for reasons never made entirely clear, after Hong Kong's old airport). Under the Kai Tak Rules, if someone's messing about or playing away, you just pretend it isn't happening. "Keep your cakehole shut, mate," says Shane, the firm's head of litigation. Bill is horrified. He would never.

Or would he?

If only things were that simple.

But life never is that simple.

So when Becca's dad falls ill back home, and Becca decides to take Holly back to London so they can be near him, Bill is left on his own. After that, things run their course pretty much as you'd expect.

Her name is JinJin Li. She used to be a teacher but, in the new China, such a job is no longer rewarding. So now she's a "canary" in Paradise Mansions, waiting for the occasional visits of her married man in his shiny big BMW. And in the meantime, there's Bill, living in the same block, who's also a married man, not to mention a "big nose pinky", but whose wife is away and, well, you get the picture.

It starts with a casual meeting in the Old Town, at the famous Huxinting teahouse, shyly holding hands. Then he goes round to her flat to eat "jiaozi" dumplings with her friends. Soon they're flying off to Guilin, the other side of China, where her dad lives. More to the point, it's a famous tourist destination, where you can watch old men fishing with cormorants: "Man and bird".

Couldn't pass up on that one, could I? I'd been there, done the research, bought the postcard. So I had to put it in. (Along with all the stuff about the murkier side of the world's fastest growing economy, the land grabs and sweatshops and peasants reduced to beggary. And the incredible vulgarity of the newly rich, with their big shiny cars that they can't even drive, and the way they mix lemonade into their vintage wine. Imagine that!)

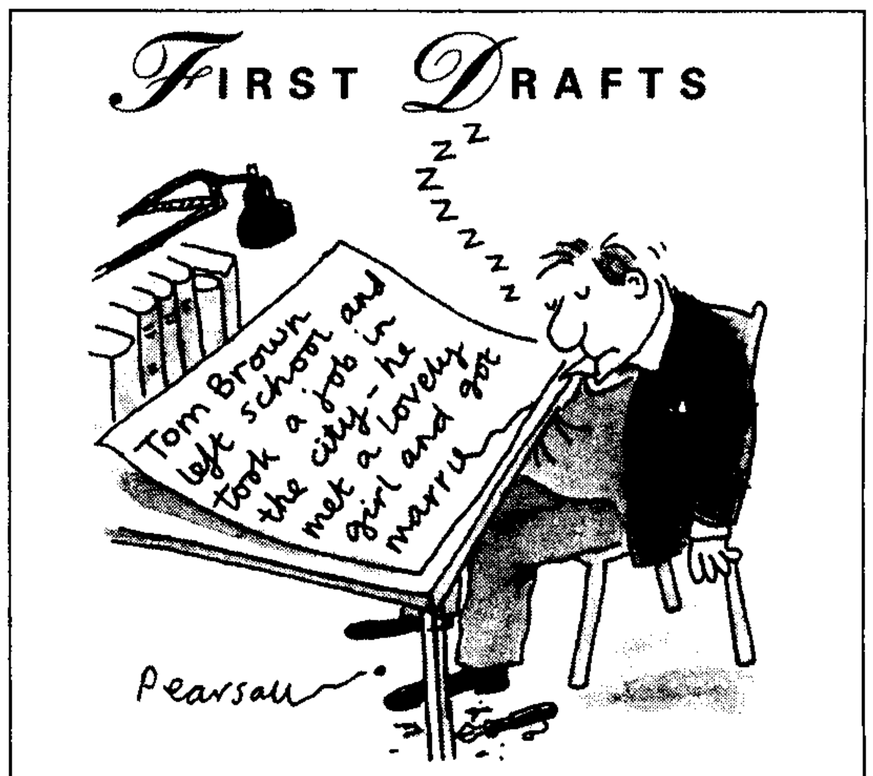
And then Becca comes back, and finds out about what Bill's been up to in her absence. There's a bit of to-ing and fro-ing. Words are uttered. Threats are made. And he can only say he's sorry. So so sorry. But will he leave her? The bamboo bint, I mean. Can he tear himself away?

Of course he can.

Because somewhere at the bottom of his heart, he knows, with all the muscular sentimentality this writer can muster, that no woman is worth leaving your only child for. It's as simple as that.

It really is.

So it's goodbye to shiny Shanghai, and hello to filthy old Heathrow, where, in the bookshop, you can probably find this novel.



George MacDonald Fraser

Books & Bookmen

■ ANDREW MOTION, the Poet Laureate, opened the 2007 Huddersfield Literary Festival to much fanfare but wasn't invited back to this year's event, which finished last week. And no wonder.

As co-organiser Michael Stewart, a writer and artist from Bradford, told the *Bradford Telegraph and Argus* last month: "When I was asked to programme the festival I was very cautious about booking big names.

"We had Andrew Motion (the Poet Laureate) opening last year and he was a waste of money (he asked for £3,000 but settled for £1,500). He read out three poems and waffled on about his childhood. I was bored to tears."

■ "AT THE moment I'm reading a book by Geoffrey Robinson, *The Unconventional Minister*," confessed writer Lynda La Plante in an interview in the *Guardian* last week. "He's the husband of my very good friend Kathy Lette."

Er... no he isn't, as the paper was forced to point out in its Corrections and Clarifications column a few days later. Kathy Lette is married to the lawyer Geoffrey Robertson QC. Obviously a very good friend...

■ WHEN the Orange Prize for Fiction was launched in 1996, the aim was to give female authors the kudos and selling power they were being robbed of by bloke-dominated judging teams.

The long list for the 2008 award (now clumsily called the Orange Broadband Prize) amusingly shows how things have changed: with female judges and winners far more numerous, the Orange panels now tacitly but rather brutally rebuke other women for their lousy judgement.

Led by Kirsty Lang, and daftly including Lily Allen, the Orange iconoclasts viewed A.L. Kennedy's *Day*, winner of both the Costa Novel and Book of the Year awards (chair: Joanna Trollope), and Sarah Hall's *The Carhullan Army*, winner of the John Llewellyn Rhys Prize (chair: Suzi Feay) as not even among the best 20 novels published in 2007-08. Rumour suggests the Booker winner, Anne Enright's *The Gathering*, only just scraped in.

Not content with ticking off recent judges of unisex awards, Kirsty, Lily and co showed earlier Orange panels what they thought of their choices: novels by former winners Helen Dunmore, Valerie Martin, Ann Patchett and Lionel Shriver joined the others on the reject pile.

■ ONCE it was known that Robert McCrum would be conducting the initial interviews for the new literary editor of the *Observer* – the post he's vacating, though only to still exercise control as "assistant editor (books)" – there was a clear favourite: William Skidelsky, former lit ed of the *New Statesman* and son of Lord Skidelsky.

And so it came to pass, with whispers of well-qualified candidates not getting past the first interview because they lacked the mysterious qualities required for a reduced job some insiders dismiss as little more than being McCrum's fag.

■ IN Faber's just-released autumn catalogue is PD James's *The Private Patient* – but has its hero, doddery Commander Adam Dalgliesh, been telling porkies about his age?

The evergreen supersleuth first appeared in *Cover Her Face* back in 1962, when he had already risen to the giddy heights of DCI. However, as the Met's compulsory retirement age for upper ranks is now 65, Dalgliesh is now asking us to believe he was born no earlier than 1944, meaning he was a detective chief inspector by the age of 18. Shome mishtake, surely?

'Bookworm'

SNIPCOCK & TWEED
IT'S THE STORY OF A MAN WHO'S SENT TO JAIL AND EXACTS A TERRIBLE REVENGE ON HIS ACCUSERS
JEFFREY ARCHER
A PRISONER OF BIRTH
HE KEEPS WRITING NOVELS!
OH MY GOD!
JEFFREY ARCHER
A PRISONER OF BIRTH

What You Didn't Miss, Pt 94

Nothing to be Frightened of

Julian Barnes

(Jonathan Cape, £16.99)

IN MY early twenties, under the influence of Somerset Maugham, whose lucid pessimism and wintry self-knowledge I admired, I kept a box-file in which I hoarded epigrams, witticisms and such *obiter dicta* that seemed to me worth preserving. There were two pieces of Maugham's wisdom that stayed with me for years.

"Two *entrees* are sometimes worth a main course" (from the late-period memoir, *I Really Am Very Bored Now*); and "Gloves make a poor present for a man with no hands" (in chapter 94 of *How Boils the Pot?).* Jules Renard writes that "If your cow dies, you may of course sell it and use the money to buy another cow." I wonder about this. What if the cow had drowned at sea and was never recovered. What if you wanted a different kind of cow? What if the cattle market was shut and there were no cows to be bought? My brother, the distinguished philosopher, says that hypothetical wants of this kind have no intrinsic validity.

It would be jolly funny, of course, if Richard Dawkins died only to discover that there really was a heaven.

But memory, as my brother the distinguished philosopher constantly reminds me, is a funny thing. I mean, I remember him as a snooty little bastard who took all the British Empire stamps and made my childhood hell; but he, curiously enough, has no recollection of this. Standing next to him in the crematorium car-park, after my mother's funeral, as the crowd of tearful onlookers began to arrange themselves in the waiting car, I remember saying: "Shift up in the back there will you, Jonno, and there'll be more room." My brother looked puzzled. Then, in I presume the same spirit that led him, when believing he was about to die, to remark "Make sure Bobby gets the *Collected Wittgenstein*", he said: "Not more room, surely, just less of it occupied?" He is, needless to say, a very clever man and I admire him a great deal.

I ask my brother, who is an *extremely* distinguished philosopher, so much so that he sometimes dresses up in a cloak and knee-breeches, when he lost his faith. He answers: "How can one lose something one has never possessed? Nevertheless, there was a moment of revelation at 7.59am on the morning of Christmas Day 1952. It was then that I realised that Santa Claus could not have visited us the previous night as there was no snow to facilitate the passage of his sled. At this moment I resolved to forswear all superstition for ever, and it is very wet of you, Julian, to still go around describing yourself as an agnostic and writing rueful little pseudo-autobiographies about how you miss God. Now I shan't be able to show my face at meetings of the Rationalist Guild (Geneva branch) and what *will* Professor Dawkins think?' As I say, he is a very clever man, even if he did have first pick of the stamps.

At Oxford I read Montaigne for the first time…[*continues for thousands of pages*]

LIBRARY NEWS

■ THE closure of Delph village library near Oldham to save £31,000 was maladministration and injustice, the local government ombudsman has ruled.

When Oldham councillors approved the closure of the 150-year-old library in 2005, a local community association was ready to step in and run the service – but then members discovered that the council had allowed no budget for the premises.

Although the council had been working with the would-be volunteers before the decision, the ombudsman found no mention of the building costs in any of the reports to councillors on the planned closure. In fact, a briefing note stated that the budget reduction referred only to "staffing costs".

Indefatigable Delphers managed to keep their library open and even increased its opening hours. Ombudsman Anne Seex ordered the council to help them find new sources of funding for the library and to pay £750 in compensation for the fiasco.

■ Villagers in Horsmonden in Kent are fighting the county council's plans to close their library and replace it with one visit a week from a mobile library – probably during school hours so children will have no chance to use it. Campaigners say that borrowing from the village library, which opens on Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays, has almost trebled in the past year. But will that be enough?

HIGH PRINCIPALS

HARD on the heels of Southampton University's decision to close the world-renowned Textile Conservation Centre (*Eye* 1199), the Royal College of Art is suspending this year's intake of students for the conservation MA that it runs with the Victoria and Albert Museum.

It was just two years ago that the V&A told the Lords' science and technology committee: "It is becoming more difficult to attract [skilled conservators] to work in the heritage sector as they are valuable elsewhere in industry and can dictate higher rewards... The V&A/RCA MA conservation course is recognised for the quality and relevance of its unique approach to postgraduate learning in conservation. Since 1989 this partnership in education and training has provided advanced and specialist learning to maintain high-level conservation skills to work on national collections."

The college's announcement said that in the light of the V&A's "assessment of its priorities", the course will "no longer be a core activity for the museum".

If ensuring that there are people with the skills and knowledge to care for the national collection is not a priority for the V&A (especially if other institutions won't be around to provide the training), then what is? The RCA says that without V&A backing, closing the postgrad course is "sad, but unavoidable".

POOR Anglia Ruskin University found itself languishing at the bottom of the *Sunday Times* league table last year. However could it boost its ratings?

One factor in calculating the league tables is the Ipsos-MORI-run National Student Satisfaction survey (NSS), in which students are asked to rate the teaching they received.

So Anglia Ruskin's director of student affairs, Dr Paul McHugh, sent a memo to staff in January, suggesting that while they shouldn't try to "unduly" influence NSS responses, it would be reasonable to point out to students who can't be bothered to complete the forms that the responses affect the league tables and that "that reputation will be attached to the qualification with which they leave us".

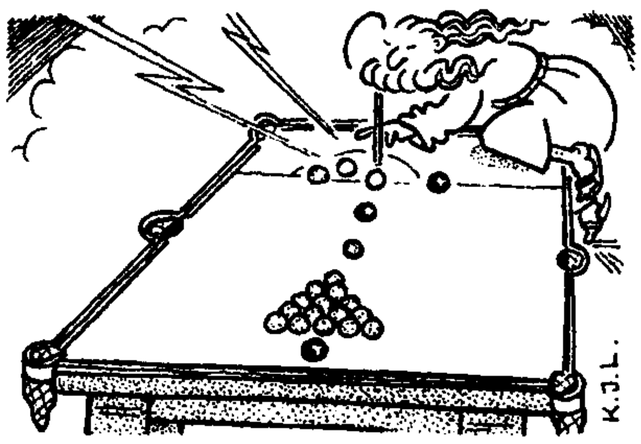
Pseuds Corner

"Like me, he is a bruised pilgrim."

Ex-minister and former prisoner Jonathan Aitken offers succour to Conrad Black as the newspaper tycoon is sent to prison, BBC Website

When Hanna was nine months old she learned to crawl. Unfortunately, she could only go backwards. The expression on her face broke my heart as she moved farther and farther away from the toy she was trying to reach. It was like a metaphor for our fight to stabilise global temperatures.

ANGHARAD PENRHYN JONES,
Guardian



He's bought a substantial stake in the Royal Surrey Snooker Club in Abbotsbury Road, providing the perfect practice facility. And locking the doors to the club as he plays during the day, this is a self-imposed exile of biblical proportions.

BEN THOMPSON, *Wandsworth Borough News*, on Jimmy White's comeback strategy

Reflect the fact that we are just as obsessed and infatuated as men. We love music just as hard. It's just that we don't exhibit that obsession, that love, through an alphabetised record collection. You want to know how I store my records? I put the ones next to each other that I think would be friends. I suppose you could call that emotional; I call it womanly.

LAURA BARTON,
Guardian

Is depression part of the artistic temperament?
All creative people are highly tuned. They are the people who are bright and intense, usually with a high intellect, and that comes with a price. We feel the shadows as profoundly as we do the light.

ANNIE LENNOX,
The Times

Challenging Images of Parking Competition.
We are challenging you to send in an image portraying car parks as visually appealing urban spaces. This could include architectural interest, their role as destination gateways, their form and function in built environments, interchanges between different forms of transport and even embarkation points. Open to all parking professionals.

Email sent by Parkex, 'Europe's largest dedicated parking exhibition'

Pseuds Corporate

Hasbro's portfolio of products has tremendous emotional resonance with children and adults. They offer an exciting opportunity for us to develop tent-pole movies with built-in global brand awareness, which is a key component of our slate strategy.

Universal Pictures on their deal with the Hasbro toy company

CONTRIBUTORS: Keith McIntyre, Iain MacIsaac, Nick Booth, Piers Pennington, Hilary Garland, Steve Henderson, Simon Turner.

£10 paid for all entries

IN THE BACK

LABOUR'S NEW GENERAL SECRETARY

He really is the Pitts

GORDON BROWN has made an exciting break with tradition by getting Labour to appoint the City fund-manager David Pitt-Watson, chairman of Hermes Equity Ownership (pictured), as its general secretary.

In the Blair era, the custom was for a general secretary to be hailed as "a new broom" at first, and then get entangled in party-finance scandals.

Peter Watt, Pitt-Watson's predecessor, quit last year after admitting that he knew about proxy donations from property developer David Abrahams. *His* predecessor, Matt Carter, was questioned by police in the "cash for honours" affair, having encouraged tycoons such as Chai Patel and Sir Gulam Noon to get round the rules on disclosing donations by giving the party secret "loans" instead.

No danger of that in the Age of Change: instead, Labour has chosen a general secretary who has *already* been entangled in party-funding scandals before even starting the job! Back in November 1997 it was Pitt-Watson – then the party's finance director – who leapt into a London cab and raced round to Bernie Ecclestone's house to hand back his second £1m cheque, in a desperate attempt to "draw a line" under New Labour's first financial scandal.

He returned to the City soon afterwards and became a mini-tycoon himself: two years ago his pay package topped £2m. Wearing his City hat, he recently gave the *FT* his thoughts on the credit crunch: "The failures that caused the current credit crisis are the same ones that brought down Enron, Worldcom and Parmalat: lack of accountability, lack of responsibility, and lack of transparency."

Lack of transparency? Pitt-Watson knows all about that. He is vice-president of the Labour Finance & Industry Group (LFIG), through which pro-Labour bankers and corporate heads "give confidential advice to Labour's political leadership". But it's also a conduit for anonymous donations, since a legal loophole means that unincorporated associations such as LFIG can give money to the party without revealing where it came from. (When the Conservatives exploit the same loophole with their secretive group of pro-Tory businessmen, the Midlands Industrial Council, they are of course thoroughly lambasted by Labour.)

And then there's his secret gift to Wendy Alexander last summer, when she stood unopposed for the Scottish Labour leadership. Last month, already in trouble over an illegal donation from an offshore businessman, Wendy finally succumbed to demands that she name everyone who gave less than £1,000 to her campaign. It turned out that the 10 rich admirers – including Pitt-Watson – each independently decided to donate £990 or £995, so falling just below the threshold at which she would have to declare the money. A remarkable coincidence? No: just a shameless and deliberate attempt at concealment.

Pitt-Watson also donated £2,500 to Gordon Brown's leadership campaign last year, with his wife Ursula Barnes chipping in another £2,500. (Both declared, this time.) But then came the Northern Rock fiasco, which could easily have tested his friendship with the Supreme Leader. For Pitt-Watson's Hermes Equity Ownership had a significant stake in Northern Wreck, and he strongly opposed nationalisation. As recently as 4 February he warned that "we need a continued private sector solution… Whatever's done needs to be agreed by the shareholders". A fortnight later the government nationalised Northern Rock, without any agreement from shareholders.

Hermes may soon join other irate investors in a lawsuit against Messrs Brown and Darling, which could have caused embarrassment all round if David Pitt-Watson were still at the helm. So perhaps he got out just in time. How kind of Gordon to spend four hours last Monday bullying the NEC into choosing Pitt-Watson rather than Mike Griffiths, a union official. In many companies and institutions, the fact that Gordon had a financial obligation to one candidate for a job would disqualify him from even attending the meeting, let alone railroading the appointment through. But why should the Supreme Leader heed such petty bourgeois niceties?

POLICE FORENSICS

Dogged pursuit

WHAT is it about man's best friend that makes police and journalists suspend their critical faculties?

Stories of possible multiple murder and subterranean torture chambers at the Haut de la Garenne children's home in Jersey have been fuelled by faithful reporting of the antics of two sniffer dogs turned apparent supersleuths, Eddie (pictured) and Keela. But how good are they?

Enhanced victim recovery dogs, or "cadaver dogs", are usually used to try to find missing bodies in shallow graves or, in bomb blasts or natural disasters, to find the living or the dead, or indeed body parts. But the pair working in Jersey have been credited with much more: sniffing out old fragments of human bone buried deep under concrete; detecting the "smell of corpses" on objects or in rooms; and detecting blood after items have been washed several times.

Police have suggested (and newspapers duly reported) that up to seven bodies may be found thanks to the two super spaniels.

It was the same jetsetting canines who were called in to help find missing Madeleine McCann.

Portuguese police switched the focus of their investigation on to her parents after Eddie was said to have picked up the "smell of corpse" on Mrs McCann's bible and "body fluids" in the boot of their holiday car, where later DNA traces were said to have been found. Keela was said to have detected blood traces on the washed walls of the family's holiday apartment, from where Madeleine disappeared. Neither discovery appears to have stood up to forensic scrutiny.

Eddie and Keela used to be South Yorkshire police dogs; but now they and their former policeman handler have gone freelance. It seems there are no guidelines governing how such dogs are used and no test to show how reliable they are. Yet their responses are seized on by police and press as an indication of events in a way that a detective's hunch, or a provisional line of inquiry, never would be. Hence Eddie's "strong reaction" to the unearthing of what might be more bone fragments at the same site as a part of a so-far undated child's skull is used to suggest they are definitely human.

Until the dogs are subject to the kind of forensic scrutiny attached to scientists, tales of multiple murders at the Jersey care home should be treated as no more than shaggy dog stories.

TREASURY JUNKETS

It's meat and drink

MORE on Gordon Brown's not-so-prudent Treasury where there was junketing aplenty for the likes of permanent secretary Sir Nicholas Macpherson and the man who looks after the department's relationship with business, John Kingman.

Using freedom of information laws, the *Eye* has discovered that among the 76 separate occasions on which the top civil servants received hospitality in a 21-month period up to 2006 were dozens of meals at up-market London eateries (Ritz, Mosimann's, Moro, Quirinale etc) courtesy of accountancy firms, banks and lobbyists.

There were also the dinners at the most prestigious gentlemen's clubs. In one belt-bursting week Kingman could be found dining at the Athenaeum, the Reform and the Travellers as treats from PR firms Bell Pottinger and Brunswick and beancounters PwC.

Those with most interest in Treasury policy are naturally the most assiduous schmoozers. In early 2006 the Association of British Insurers took Kingman to the Cinnamon Club and the mandarin with the pension policy brief, Mark Neale, to lunch at an unknown venue. At the time ABI members were desperate to be included in plans for pensions despite their mis-selling history. When the pensions white paper came out a few weeks later, they duly were.

Then there was a night at the opera for Kingman from consultants McKinsey, even though Treasury rules make clear that: "It is unlikely that entertainment at the opera… is likely to lead to serious work being done… consider carefully whether the benefits to your work clearly outweigh the risks." So why did Kingman go? "Because he was invited," the Treasury replied dismissively.

And, as the last *Eye* reported, Macpherson enjoyed the 2006 Wimbledon men's singles final with the then BBC chairman Michael Grade just as the licence fee settlement was being negotiated, despite the government's warnings that freebies in such circumstances might break the Prevention of Corruption Acts.

Yet it seems routine for top mandarins to break the rules – which might ordinarily prompt investigation by the National Audit Office. Wonder what it makes of excessive hospitality?

● The full list of junkets is available on the Treasury's website under FoI disclosures.

OUTSOURCING

Lie of the land

LIE-DETECTOR technology developed by Mossad for interrogating suspected Palestinian terrorists is being used in British Jobcentres.

Outsourcing "specialist" Capita has deployed the "Advanced Validation System" in an attempt to catch benefit cheats at five Nottinghamshire Jobcentres and the Department of Work and Pensions call centre in Lincoln.

Over a three-month trial 1,250 claimants of income support and jobseekers' allowance must undergo AVS. Those whose voices show signs of "stress" when answering questions are called in for what Crapita describe as "corroboration interviews". Exactly where this leaves genuine claimants who exhibit signs of stress caused by the indignity of being treated like terror suspects is unclear.

If it's a success – i.e. if it results in more people losing their benefits – it will be "rolled out" to all Jobcentre Plus offices and DWP call centres across the UK, and millions of pounds will "roll in" to Crapita's coffers.

PRESS FREEDOM

Loan sharks

HAVING just boasted of making a £178m profit, one would have thought Johnston Press might be happy to fund the defence of senior journalist Sally Murrer, who faces a controversial criminal prosecution which goes to the heart of press freedom.

But the *Eye* has learned that the wealthy publisher of the *Milton Keynes Citizen* has merely offered Murrer a loan – repayment of which could render the mother of three homeless if she loses the case. Perhaps as a measure of its deep concern, however, Johnston has generously agreed not to charge interest or a fee on the deal!

Murrer was arrested last May, strip-searched and had her home and office raided by Thames Valley Police (see *Eye* 1200). She was finally charged with soliciting and receiving leaks from local detective Mark Kearney. He, of course, is the retired officer who recently blew the whistle on the Sadiq Khan prison bugging scandal (see *Eye* 1204). Though the charges the pair now face are unrelated and concern rather trivial stories, Murrer believes the prosecution is connected to the Khan affair, because Kearney, her then partner, had confided in her that he was being asked to do something unethical.

At the time Johnston Press publicly pledged to fund Murrer's defence. But behind closed doors its subsidiary, Premier Newspaper Ltd, drew up an agreement under which she must pay back all her legal costs. The loan offer is staggering, not least because Premier specifically recognises that Murrer's prosecution arose out of her work for the newspaper, whose managers were aware of her relationship with Kearney, a police press officer before he switched to prison intelligence.

If the case were to go to appeal, the costs could reach well into six figures, and Murrer, who works part time to look after her children – one of whom is severely autistic – would face bankruptcy. Colleagues, who recently went on strike over pay, understaffing and editorial quality issues, claim bosses seized on comments Murrer made soon after her traumatic arrest in which she apparently offered to pay them back.

Like Kearney, Murrer would be entitled to legal aid; but the private arrangement being pushed by Johnston and her solicitors, Woodfines, would stop her entitlement and would also prevent trade union funding. But a senior Johnston executive, who earlier this month left the office in mysterious circumstances, told her not to agree.

On 10 March Murrer struggled through her tears to enter a not guilty plea. Her trial – one of a number of cases where Inspector Knacker is trying to criminalise unauthorized contact between police officers and reporters – is set for November. As a measure of the state's resolve to get a result, the prosecution is being led by Sir Allan Green, the former director of public prosecutions who was forced to resign for kerb-crawling.

● A typographical error in the story about the Khan bugging inquiry in the last *Eye* inadvertently suggested it was Ali Dizaei who resigned from the police force during an investigation into his expenses and personal life. It was of course former terrorist chief Andy Hayman who resigned. Dizaei was the victim of dodgy charges instigated by Knacker and subjected to unlawful phone bugging authorized by Hayman.

ACTIS & THE CONSULTANTS

The big buy-out sell-out

IT'S a fair bet that any major taxpayer rip-off will have been a bonanza for consultants. And so it was when publicly owned international development fund CDC, whose purpose is the relief of poverty, sold its fund management arm (re-badged as "Actis") to a few lucky bosses (*Eyes passim*).

The going rate for advisers' fees on this kind of private equity buy-out is a few percent of the sale price, but when the taxpayer's paying the sky's the limit. Thus the Department for International Development shelled out £345,000 to bankers CSFB to pronounce a private equity-style deal feasible, which was almost as much as the paltry £373,000 the CDC managers paid for Actis (before getting it all back, and more, through a £2.3m "post-transaction bonus").

That was just for starters, however. Along came the main course in the shape of private equity advisers Campbell Lutyens with a bill for £1.8m. The beancounters weren't to be left out, either. PwC picked up £160,000 for some tax advice, while KPMG trousered £175,000 for the derisory valuation of Actis. All of which needed to be lawyered by Field Fisher Waterhouse at a cost of £420,000.

Meanwhile CDC has gone coy over the tax haven arrangements that leave it with a 1.4 percent tax bill, depriving the poor countries it operates in of fortunes (see last *Eye*). Asked to account for the figure, a spokeswoman said: "CDC does not hold this information in the form requested." So much for the company's promise to be "open and honest in all its dealings".

An inquiry into the transformation of Britain's £3bn development fund into a private equity outfit, with the usual trappings of short-termism, tax avoidance, job cuts and astronomical salaries for the bosses, might not be far off. Tory MP Tim Loughton and Lib Dem shadow development secretary Michael Moore have both asked the National Audit Office to investigate. Moore told the *Eye*: "Only a forensic examination of this deal by the NAO will get to the heart of what the government has been up to. We all know New Labour's fascination with clever financial arrangements, but this looks like a deal too far."

BOGUS EXPERTS

Bates gets the third degree!

JIM BATES, the high-profile computer "expert" who, the *Eye* revealed in 2005, lied about his qualifications (he didn't have any), has been convicted of perjury and four counts of making false statements.

Over the years Bates has been involved in many sensitive cases. He was the defence expert central to the dropping of child pornography charges against Brian Stevens, the Soham murder detective later jailed for perjury for concocting a false alibi in the case.

And *Eye* readers will recall that Bates was also the expert whose unreliable evidence was used by police to bring trumped up charges against Gurpal Virdi, then a police sergeant and accused of sending race hate mail to fellow ethnic minority officers. On one occasion that Bates maintained Virdi was at his computer composing the offensive material, as Virdi's subsequent successful tribunal found, he was actually at another police station altogether. On another occasion pinpointed by Bates, the offensive material had already been printed off and sealed in the office despatch system.

These two cases, however, did not form part of the material put before the jury at Leicester crown court where Bates defended himself against the five charges, mostly relating to his evidence in computer fraud cases. In each Bates had claimed he had a BSc in electronic engineering, and in one of the cases, decided at the Old Bailey, he went on to repeat the lie on oath in the witness box.

When the *Eye* first confronted Bates about his non-existent degree, he claimed he held an equivalent qualification obtained in 1965 from the Association of Electronic Engineers in Leicester. But the association did not exist (and the only such body the *Eye* could track down was in Hong Kong). Then Bates claimed that although he thought he was entitled to use the qualification – which was on his website, the UK Register of Experts and the Institute of Analysts and Programmers (of which Bates was president) – he had not actually used it for court work. When the *Eye* told him that we held a cover sheet to one of his sworn forensic reports, which claimed a degree, Bates said it must be forgery.

Under cross-examination in Leicester, when it was put to him that he held no formal qualifications at all, Bates told an unbelieving jury that he felt entitled to use the BSc boast "in my world where I am judged by my peers". When asked about those who had spent years studying to gain genuine qualifications, he replied: "That's your world." Unfortunately for Bates, who will be sentenced next month, that is also the real world.

Bates was the first to complain loudly when the child porn case against Soham family liaison officer Brian Stevens collapsed because a prosecution expert had made mistakes in his analysis of the detective's laptop. Bates even called for an inquiry into all the other cases carried out by Brian Underhill, a former policeman, saying: "Any solicitor worth their salt will be looking to see if they can get their case thrown out simply because he is listed as an expert witness."

So the *Eye* asked if the Crown Prosecution Service was now reviewing all other cases that have involved Bates. A spokeswoman said: "We are currently reviewing our position and will take account of any comments the judge may make when sentencing."

The judge has already said that in the four cases before him at Leicester crown court, there was no suggestion Bates had adversely affected the outcome of any trials. But what about the many other cases in which he has acted as a so-called expert?

FOLLOW-UP... FOLLOW-UP... FOLLOW-UP...

■ LOCKERBIE appeal: Lawyers for Ali Mohmed al-Megrahi, the man convicted of the Lockerbie bombing, have lost their first attempt to get their hands on the secret documents that could clear his name (see last *Eye*).

They had argued that since Scotland's top prosecutor, the Lord Advocate, had decided that the documents could be shown to the defence, it was not open for the Advocate General (the country's top law officer) to intervene on behalf of Foreign Secretary David Miliband, who has issued a public interest immunity (PII) certificate. (As *Eye* readers are aware, the documents are believed to relate indirectly to the bomb timer said to have been used to blow up Pan Am 103).

However, three Scottish appeal court judges, much to the dismay of the bereaved families, last week said the Advocate General was indeed entitled to step in, adding that the Lord Advocate had made her recommendation subject to approval from the Advocate General.

Jim Swire, father of Flora, who died in the 1988 blast, said: "PII certificates carry as their justification and title the interests of 'the public'. That interest includes the need to have faith in the independence and fairness of the judicial system. Can the substance of a document shown to the prosecution at least 12 years ago, concerning a terrorist outrage nearly 20 years ago and always denied to the defence, really be of such significance to the Whitehall government that they are prepared to risk wrecking what is left of the reputation of Scottish criminal justice over it?"

Still, the fight for disclosure is not yet over. It is still open to the judges to order disclosure in the interests of a fair hearing, once they have considered all the arguments at a later date.

In the City

BAHAMAS-based British investor Joe Lewis's bet on Wall Street investment bank Bear Stearns may go down in financial history as one of the worst calls of all time. The London-born Lewis, 71, whose investments include Tottenham Hotspur, may have lost up to $1.2bn (£600m) in less than eight months. Even for a man reckoned to be worth close to £3bn, that is a serious loss of wealth.

Lewis, who developed his mystique and fortune from foreign currency and property deals (the latter, some with his friends from the world of Irish racehorse owners, more traceable than the former), is a man known to like a gamble. But he took a major punt with Bear Stearns, piling in last July three days after the fifth biggest bank on Wall Street had revealed that two hedge funds once worth $20bn had imploded. Lewis had been a Bear Stearns client for several years.

The Bear Stearns funds were the first casualties/portents of the US "sub-prime" crisis. The funds had become all but worthless despite the bank injecting more than $3bn in June. Then, in December, Bear Stearns reported losses of $859m. Now the Federal Reserve Bank still has to pump in up to $30bn to cover toxic mortgage-backed securities held by the investment bank to prevent a fire sale of assets by rescuers J.P. Morgan Chase and a worsening of the overall crisis.

From his mansion on Lyford Cay, bottom fisher Lewis clearly must have figured that Bear Stearns' shares were oversold and the sub-prime threat to Wall Street overdone. On 20 July he began buying Bear Stearns shares at $150 (they had fallen from a high of $169 the previous January). Lewis acquired shares through five Bahamian companies – Aquarian Investments, Cambria, Darcin, Mandarin and Nivon – all part of his Florida-based Tavistock Group. By early September, when his 7 percent stake was disclosed, Lewis had spent $860m to buy just over 8m shares at prices from $103 to $150 a pop. Just over 4m of these shares had been bought at prices of $104 to $109.

But Lewis had also taken some further big bets on a Bear Stearns comeback. He had "buy" options on a further 791,500 shares only partly covered by "sell" options on 706,500 shares.

For a time the shares recovered, going back over $125 in October before falling again. Lewis resumed his buying, adding a further 1,157,000 shares at just under $119 each. But as the price fell, Lewis started to be hit with sales from one or more option holders. He was forced to take some 687,000 on 19 October at $120 each. By early December Lewis held 9.25m Bear Stearns shares, or 8 percent, at a cost of a fraction over $1bn.

From late October the shares began to slide, dropping below $100 in December after news of the losses for the third quarter. So the option holders continued to hit on Lewis as fears about the effects of the sub-prime crisis on Bear Stearns grew, despite an injection of $1bn in new Chinese capital.

Over three days before Christmas and the announcement of the $859m loss, Lewis took up 1.686m Bear Stearns shares at prices from $90 to $110. At 21 December, the latest date for which he has reported his shareholding, the great investor held 11.05m shares in the stricken investment bank or just under 10 percent at a cost of $1.186bn. Why Lewis did not sell the options and walk away from the heavily loss-making trades is a mystery so far.

"I knew we shouldn't have over-stretched ourselves"

Last week Bear Stearns shares collapsed as rumours spread that – like Northern Wreck – clients were bailing out with their cash and the banks were pressing. Before last weekend's rescue the value of these shares had plunged by more than half in three days to $30. The agreed bid from J.P. Morgan is at just $2.

This would mean Lewis recovering just $22m on his $1bn-plus Bear Stearns play for a loss of $1.164bn – assuming he still holds all the shares.

The five Lewis companies described the funding for their Bear Stearns share purchases as coming from "working capital". The assumption is that this means bank borrowings. Lewis has usually operated with large credit facilities from Bear Stearns and other Wall Street banks; his companies will almost certainly have been pressed hard in recent days and weeks for margin calls to boost the amount of capital replacing the falling Bear Stearns share price.

Just how much Lewis had had to pony up by last Friday – when the shares fell $27 on a volume of almost 200m shares – and whether the banks forced him to sell out will emerge when the smoke clears. That is usual practice for banks when a share held as security goes into freefall. If so, then the good news for Lewis is that this could have cut the loss to at most a mere $850m.

Just how he will finance that Bear Stearns debacle remains to be seen. Neither assets sales nor new financing based on other assets is probably easy right now. Which will no doubt encourage suggestions that he may soon want out of Tottenham. That may be more saleable than 8,000 acres of Florida.

But what is clear is that the "Joe Lewis, legend and billionaire" status has taken a major knock – just as that of Carlyle Group has done with the collapse of its Carlyle Capital hedge fund.

The huge hit taken by Lewis makes a point often lost in the blizzard of coverage regarding the credit crunch. The three-figure billions lost by banks ignore the related losses made by their clients or shareholders – such as in Northern Wreck. The two-figure billion losses suffered by the growing number of closing hedge funds – Carlyle, Peloton, Drake – represent losses for individuals as well as institutions, such as pension funds. These, too, are exposed to the risks in private equity funds, which are starting to struggle to meet debt payments or find new financing.

Like at the other end of the food chain, the all too visible US foreclosures and UK repossessions are the individual cost of the sub-prime crisis that started it all. Thus there is an imminent large ripple of company and individual casualties as these investments disappear, often leaving the loans with which they were acquired still to be repaid.

The losses suffered by hedge and private equity fund investors are all too real. Taking a loss such as Lewis has suffered on Bear Stearns is hard to manage, even for a billionaire. Those who are not so rich or are more reliant on bank finance – such as some high-profile players in the UK property and buyout markets – will do well to survive 2008.

"WHEN it ends, it always ends badly." That was the view a year ago of Stephen Schwarzman, chairman of private equity group Blackstone, before the sub-prime crisis hit and ahead of the group's giant public offering in June. History may well relate that the Blackstone Group IPO last June was the last but biggest hurrah of the "greed is good" private equity bubble.

Schwarzman, who had a 60th birthday bash for 1,500 of his closest friends last year for which he hired Rod Stewart, walked away with $677m cash from sales before the flotation. His partner Peter Peterson did almost three times better – a staggering $1.88bn from selling at the time of the $7.8bn IPO.

Some smart US observers suggested that if the Blackstone founders were selling the boom was over and now was not the time to buy. But, aided by a $3bn investment by a Chinese sovereign wealth fund, the lemmings piled in just the same. Blackstone floated at $31 and hit a peak of $38. The shares started this week around $14.

Schwarzman can point to the fact that the value of his near-$5bn stake provided by the IPO has also more than halved. Peterson said he was donating much of his windfall to charity.

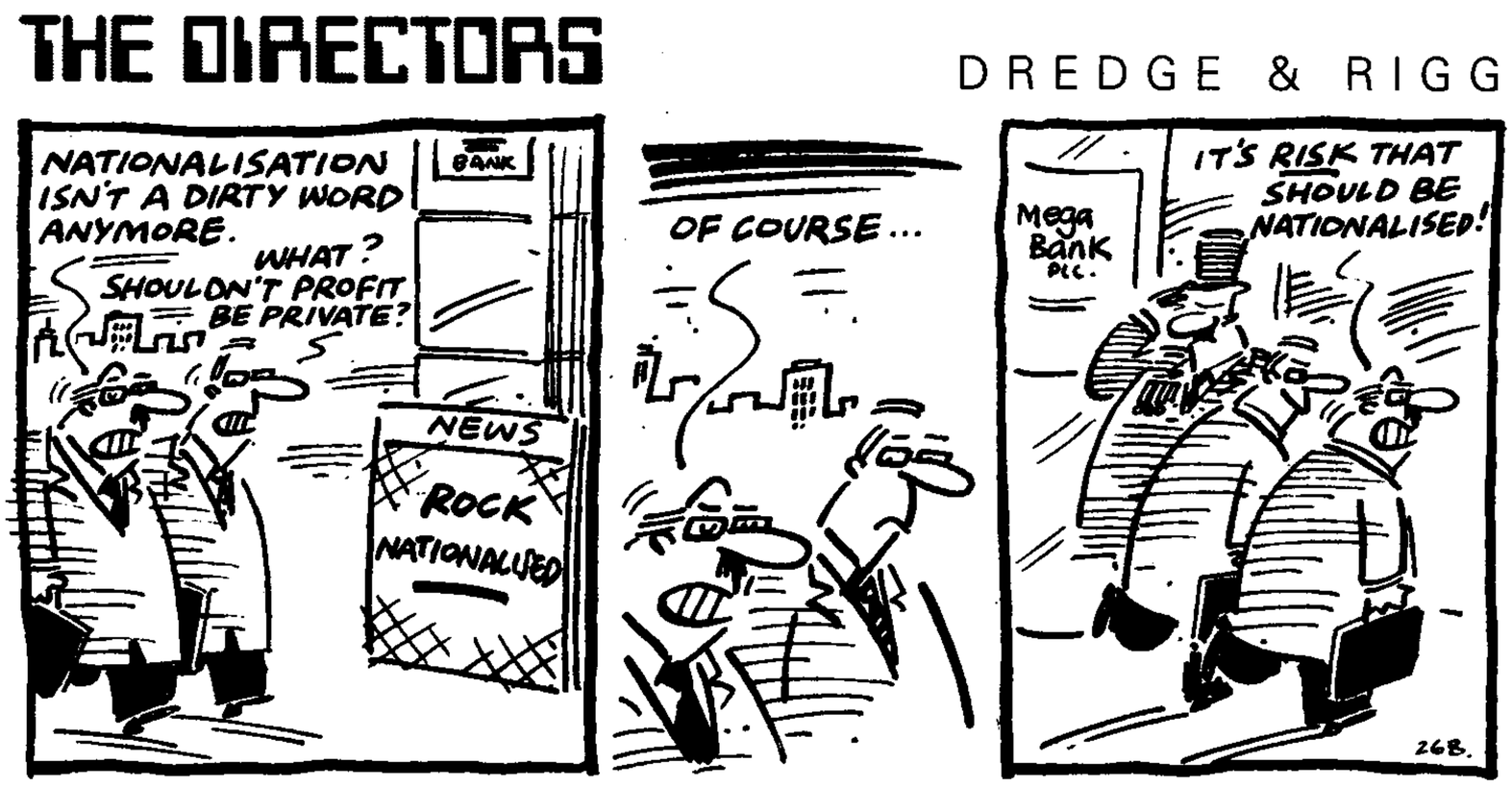
"We are in the midst of a severe financial crisis," Schwarzman remarked last week. Happily, he and Peterson have enough cash to get by. But it has certainly ended badly for the Chinese and other Blackstone investors who bought into the private equity bubble.

TURKISH Cypriot fugitive Asil Nadir may not be able to travel outside his northern Cyprus enclave, but the former Mr. Polly Peck still has no shortage of political and business friends.

Earlier this month he was reported to be closely involved in a deal to reopen the Lefkonico/Gecitkale airport, which has been privatised as a proposed cargo hub. A 15-year, €1.5m-a-year lease has been signed by a British company, Cyprus Aviation Services. Local media reports describe CAS as being owned or represented by Nadir, who was present at the signing ceremony.

Despite admitting: "Nothing happens in northern Cyprus without Asil Nadir being involved," CAS director David Millham says Nadir is "not involved with the company" and "has no role to play". It seems Nadir sees things differently. But then who would finance a Nadir company – CAS, which has yet to produce any accounts, has to get the airport fit for commercial operations – after the Polly Peck fraud is open to question.

Meanwhile, Nadir is also said to be active in developing some sites in the Karpass peninsula which used to be owned by Polly Peck in association with Israeli-based investors.



ANOTHER Brit to discover the attractions of northern Cyprus is world cruiserweight champion David Haye.

The Londoner appeared in the ring for his knockout of rival Enzo Maccarinelli earlier this month wearing the flag of the unrecognised Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. He also waxed lyrically about its attractions while declaring that he had moved there to live with his family.

Such a move could have big tax attractions if Haye becomes non-UK resident, now that he is earning six-figure purses. Just how much tax he would face in the TRNC is unclear – especially as his income from recent big fights in Paris and London would not need to go there. High-profile arrivals can often negotiate advantageous tax deals with their new homes – just ask Formula One's Lewis Hamilton.

HOW THE GUARDIAN WORKS, PT 94

THE right-on *Guardian* is never slow to campaign against those it sees as dodging UK tax. A week after rediscovering the story about Tesco and the Cayman Islands tax haven (see last *Eye*), it launched another attack, this time over a PFI deal regarding the Treasury and Home Office headquarters.

"Home Office and Treasury now owned offshore" was the outraged front-page headline. "Scheme to save taxpayers money that became tax avoidance scheme" was the banner headline above a full inside page exposé of the PFI schemes based in Guernsey and Jersey involving bankers HSBC and private equity houses 3i and Babcock & Brown.

But what was this tucked away at the bottom right-hand corner without any headline?

"Guardian Media Group plc, parent company of the *Guardian*, in partnership with Apax Partners, has incorporated a new company registered in the Cayman Islands as part of its proposed acquisition of Emap plc. The sale of Emap plc is due to complete later this month."

A spokesman for GMG said: "The tax arrangements of Apax Partners and GMG for the acquisition of Emap plc are completely legitimate, and are based on accepted practice and the recommendations of our advisers. This is not about GMG avoiding tax – indeed, we have paid an average of 34% tax over the last five years.

"The purchase of Emap plc is structured as a UK Scheme of Arrangement which, as has long been accepted by HM Revenue and Customs, does not attract stamp duty on acquisitions. The new company will pay its full UK corporation tax."

So that's all right, then! No doubt a reference to this outstanding item of tax-avoidance hypocrisy will appear every time the *Guardian* decides to criticise the similar "legitimate" tax arrangements of Tesco, HSBC and 3i.

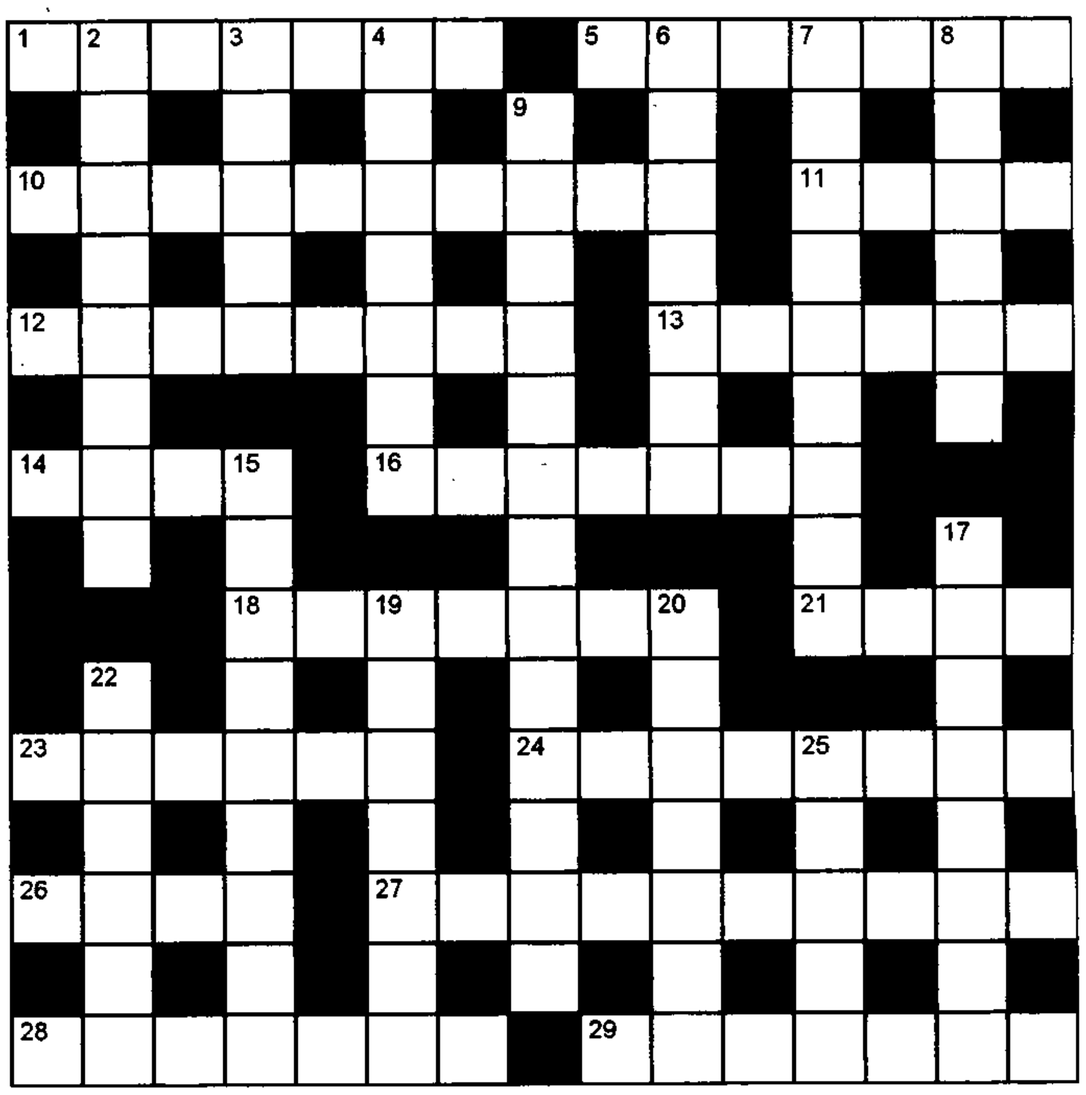
'Slicker'

EYE CROSSWORD 361

by Cyclops

£100 prize to first correct solution opened on 28 March 2008

Entries to 'Crossword', Private Eye, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN or via email to crossword@private-eye.co.uk



ACROSS

1 Wacky as a copper back in the station? (7)
5 Perch no. 3 for one like John Redwood? (3,4)
10 Sad sort of compensation, bleeding entertaining chief of Manchester United (5,5)
11 Sailors strapping chap, very taken (4)
12 Celebrity rapper almost gets head from Nelly (100 euros) (8)
13 Possibly spit at Brenda's joint (6)
14 Stud – dominating type (4)
16 One you'd fancy, being delirious, etc about arse (7)
18 Neck wrenched, shit! Problem: going arse over tip (7)
21 Files: bad things according to Ross (4)
23 Washington election setback – piss! (6)
24 Start to tickle male homosexual with ruler (3,5)
26 Ball-crushing female trainer? (4)
27 Examine member – it might get stuck into PC (5,5)
28 Dick between legs, arranged as a runner would (7)
29 About to get sexy, one goes "Like an apple?" (7)

DOWN

2 Arse completely on view – it's just a phase (4,4)
3 See 9dn.
4 Monica's first one on top of Bill, following Gore's handbook (7)
6 Outing Robin? Mistake (3,4)
7 Starts to act nervously, legs in shackle, enveloped by admirer? (3,6)
8 Compete – but hemmed in by drunk old Russian (6)
9/3 A right old song and dance? Party and PM keeping mum (5,2,6,5)
15 Film maker's pitch: "Silly bugger dismisses what caveman said" (9)
17 Sulphur, piss and shit mixed, tasting a bit like syrup (8)
19 Bust Monica's half showing with Bill's butt in all the papers (7)
20 After second climax, Brenda's not one to keep mum (7)
22 Member of *Queen* with bit of skirt causing commotion (6)
25 A lay association (5)

Crossword 360 winner: ANDREW SIMON

ACROSS: 8 Untapped 9 Bagpipes 10 Penury 11 Uganda 13 Bonhomie 14/7 Kiss and tell story 18 Limpidly 19 Narked 20 The lot 21 Bawls out 23 Passover.

DOWN: 1/22 Soap star 2 Myopia 3/13 Bugs Bunny 4 Step on it 5 Spin bowler 6 Beardie 7 Shaggy 12 Nail polish 15 Sedative 16 Bighead 17 Sequin 19 Nawabs 21/24 Bird-brain.

YOBETTES
HUSBAND
Aye, is that Liz Hadley still drinkin' heavy?
No, she's not touched a drop for six months
Bleedin' 'ell, how's she managed that?
er... 'cause she died

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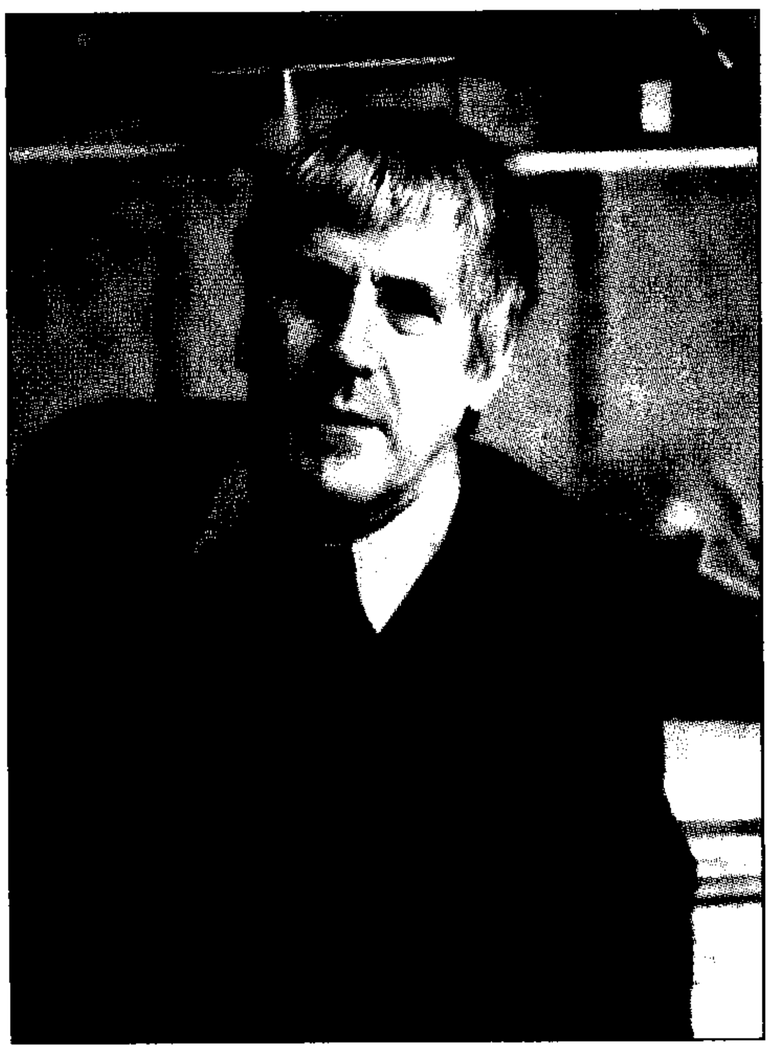

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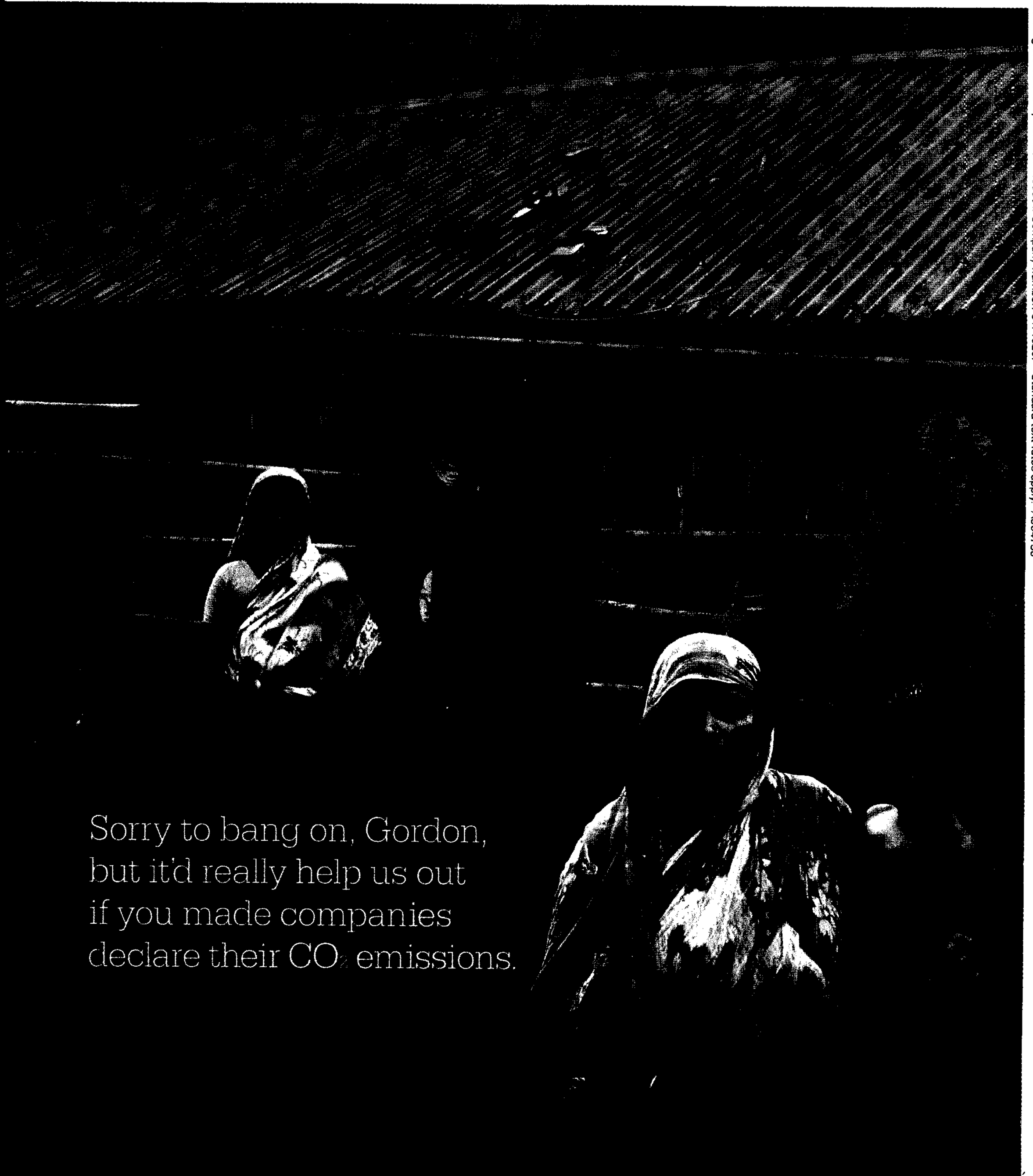

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UNIQUE GIFTS: Fabulous photo albums, handmade using your images. uniquealbums.co.uk

Eye Read

FREE NOVEL. Agent loved my book but a dozen publishers said it was too strange to sell. So I'm giving it away. Download it at myspace.com/mousebook

GOD DRIVES A FLYING SAUCER. Immaculate Conception of Our Mother Mary. By in vitro fertilisation? www.trashface.com

FAMOUS WOMEN'S QUOTE BOOK, 100 quotes, in aid of Afghan Connection charity, £3.50. www.fwqb.co.uk

WHAT DID I DO TOMORROW? Classic British Mystery Novel. LP Davies rediscovered. www.trashface.com

CAN A CULTURE BE JUDGED? Ian Robinson tries. www.edgewaysbooks.com

Eye Need

DESPERATELY NEED £5K to move Mum (87) into next door. She's currently alone, 450 miles away. PLEASE help. S/C: 01-02-77. A/C: 25012347.

GOOGLE REFUSE TO REMOVE libellous blog without court action: help needed, details from ogyde@cix.co.uk

LEFT PENNILESS by conman. Unable to pay rent and support child. S/C: 07-01-16. A/C: 26247665.

HEROES! Seeking true stories of heroic self sacrifice (past and present), for a book on heroism. Please contact edwardpeake64@hotmail.com Thank you!

GAY CREDIT CRUNCH DISASTER. 20k needed or I'm done for. S/C: 400208. A/C: 91147951

COMMISSIONED FEATURE SCRIPT, Low Budget English Comedy Drama. Established Screenwriter. Backer sunk, established Producer needed. No beginners. featurefilm@fastmail.co.uk

OVERPOPULATION. PLEASE HELP me emigrate. HSBC: J.A IVES S/C: 40-47-73. A/C: 60607479

DRIVE A PORSCHE CARRERA FREE for a year, contact ian@jonbarnes.com for details Businesses and high net worth individuals only should apply

PRACTICAL, PROFESSIONAL, HONEST single male seeks live/work space, London Zone 1-2. Cheap rent in return for security, maintenance and considerable appreciation. No Agents or con-artist's eyelive-work.co.uk

YOUNG INVESTOR DESPERATELY NEEDS HELP to continue dream, bank wont help. Need 15k to continue. Any help appreciated: S/C: 40-38-04. A/C: 42192926

MIDDLE-AGED PERSON. Failed in long term business. In need of substantial amount in order to keep up mortgage repayments and 4 grown up kids in education. Your financial help will enable him to re-build his business. Thanks in advance. S/C: 50-30-05. A/C: 24101494

JOURNALISE NEEDS £25K to avoid imminent bankruptcy. Any help appreciated. Natwest S/C: 60-22-30 A/C:70055912

STOP VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN Funds needed for new campaign. S/C: 40-35-09. A/C: 01832999. civilsociety@hotmail.co.uk

IMPOVERISHED ASTRONOMERS seek £100,000 to offset funding cutbacks by Swindon Town. donations@fukustfc.org.uk.

CHLOE, 14 IS RECEIVING chemo and radiation treatment for a brain tumour. Her mother has also recently been treated for cancer. Chloe's dream is a Florida holiday with her family. Please help. S/C: 11-08-68. A/C: 01033087 or chloe.dream@yahoo.co.uk

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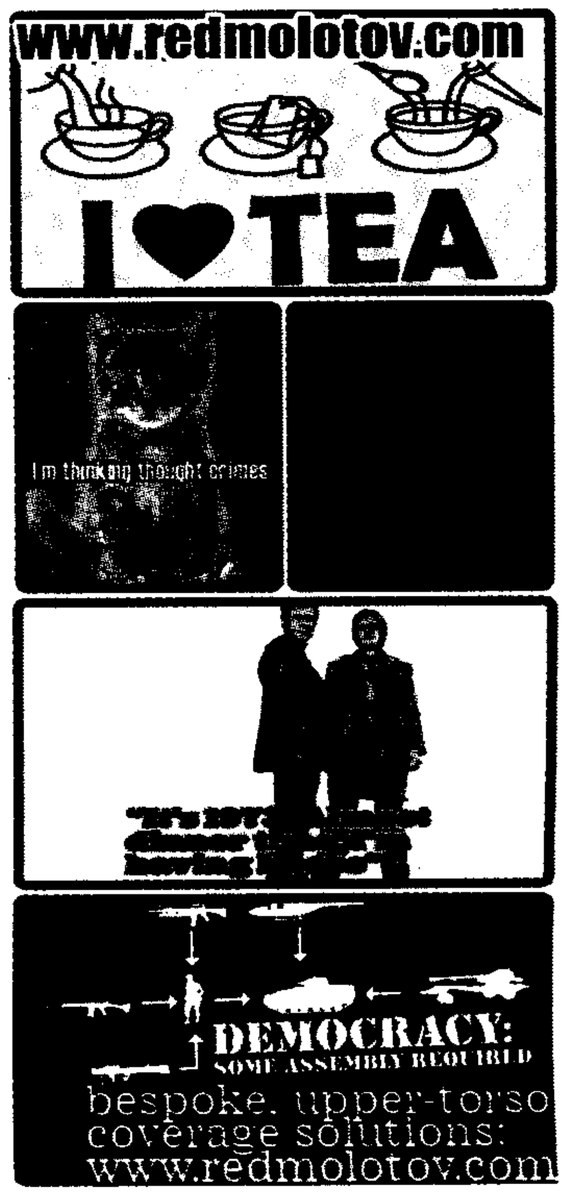

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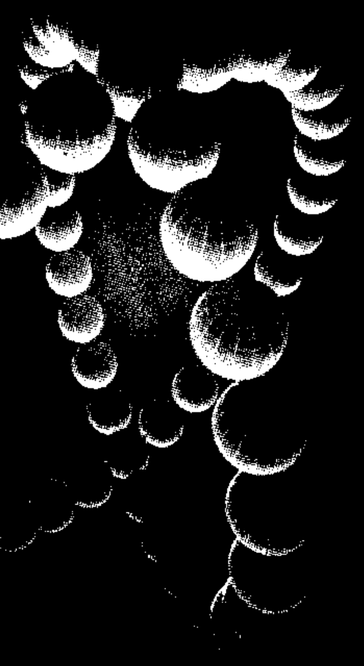

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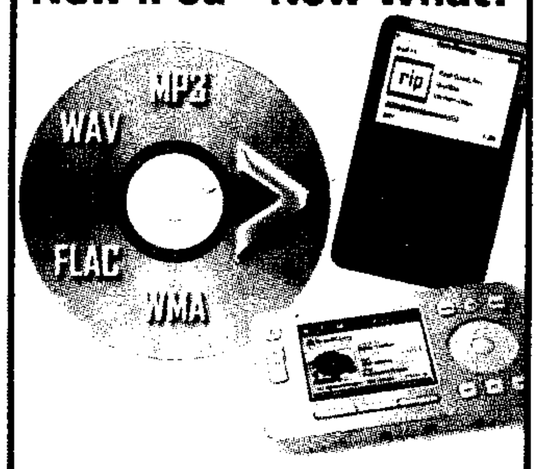

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